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SET THE STAGE FOR EIGHT

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I

BY

DORIS F. HALMAN



BOSTON

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SET THE STAGE FOR EIGHT

LADY ANNE
A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

First Produced in Detroit, Michigan, by the Theatre Arts Club, on March 18, 1921.

THOSE THAT LIVE IN THE PLAY

ROD TRENOR

MILLICENT TRENOR

TRIX DARCY

STIRES

(Note: This play requires for presentation the services of two men and three women.)

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BY DORIS F. HALMAN.

LADY ANNE

The hall of a very old English country house. The outer door, wide and ponderous, opens at the back. At stage right, a staircase winds upward to meet a gallery, which runs across the entire width of the back wall and disappears under archways, left and right. The hall itself is wainscoted very high, with dark paneling. A door at right leads to the dining room. There is a broad fireplace down left, with no fire. In the corner under the stairs stands a tall old clock. Over the outer door is suspended a lantern of wrought iron-work, in which a small electric light burns dimly behind green glass. From a latticed window above the gallery, a flood of pale moonlight shimmers in.

As the curtain rises, the tall old clock strikes twelve. No sooner has it echoed into silence than there is a sound of people at the door, and a bell rings. Stires, the butler, comes from the door, right, and, pressing a switch beside it, turns on the lights in a large chandelier. In this new brightness, the moonlight and the green lantern fade into obscurity. Stires crosses to the big door and opens it. Three people enter, giving him their wraps, and coming forward to the chairs drawn up near the fireplace.

These three are all in fancy dress, and young. The man is a pirate off the ancient seas, accentuating by swaggering line and color the assurance of his dark good looks. One woman, of a very fair and fragile beauty, dressed in the frivolous flaunting petals of a Columbine,

comes to sink wearily into an armchair. The other woman presents a contrast more incongruous. This girl trips gaily downstage and perches on the arm of her chair. But she is garbed in white from head to foot, in the long gown and the cap of a Puritan woman of Cromwell's time. She wears a smooth white wig beneath the cap, and her face and hands are whitened. The man does not sit, but comes restlessly to the fireplace.

ROD

No fire?

STIRES (*following him down*)

I'd have built one later, sir. It's earlier than I expected you back, sir, . . .

ROD (*waving him away*)

That's right enough. (*The butler goes silently out.*) It gets so beastly cold these autumn nights. (*He bends solicitously over the white lady.*) Look here, Trix! Can't I get you a cloak, or something?

TRIX

Oh, not for me! Get one for Milly. (*She wriggles in her costume.*) You know, they dressed with common sense in Lady Anne's time!

ROD (*looking at the Columbine*)

Want a cloak, Milly?

MILLY

No, thank you, Rod. I'm going straight to bed.

TRIX (*leaning forward to her*)

Poor darling Milly! You do look all done in. You've tired yourself out, giving me a good time.

ROD

If — you're having a good time with us.

TRIX

You silly old thing, don't you know I am? To see an old school friend for the first time in years, and her wonderful husband, and heavenly parties like the one to-night . . .

ROD

It's a shame Milly had to get tired, and drag you away at twelve.

MILLY

I'm sorry. But I wanted you and Trix to stay, Rod. You needn't have played the devoted husband, really.

ROD (*frowning*)

Played it?

MILLY (*with her gentle weariness*)

I could have come alone.

TRIX

Why, Milly! You never tired of anything at school. You were a pranking, naughty girl in those days. No party was too late, too gay, too secret! . . .

MILLY

There are things that make one tired . . . that happen sometimes at parties.

ROD (*in a sort of unformed challenge*)

What things?

MILLY (*after a moment*)

Music crashing over the — talk of people.

TRIX (*breaking in gaily*)

You have such jolly friends! I love them all. I'd like never to go away from them — and you dears

[*She smiles at them from her perch.*]

ROD (*smiling back*)

We never want you to, — do we, Milly?

MILLY

No.

TRIX

Rod, you humbug!

ROD

No, I'm not, I mean it.

TRIX

Well, at least, you shouldn't *say* nice things in *that* rig!

ROD

Fair preacher! Don't you know you shouldn't *smile* in yours?

TRIX

Don't family ghosts ever smile?

ROD

Not Lady Anne. She has her dignity.
[*Trix bursts into merry laughter.*]

TRIX

What a sensation she made, among those gay costumes! I wonder that you never did it, Milly.

MILLY

What?

TRIX

Borrowed Lady Anne!

MILLY

It's idiotic, but I couldn't do it.

TRIX (*astonished*)

Why?

MILLY (*smiling*)

I feel exactly as if I'd known her.

TRIX (*incredulous but thrilled*)

You never saw her floating about, — did you?

MILLY

Oh, no. But then I might some time. She *is* a member of the family. . . .

TRIX

Poor Milly! Did I shock you when I borrowed her? If I'd known that, on my honor, I wouldn't have done it.

ROD

Nonsense, Trix! You're perfectly welcome to Lady Anne, or anything else we have.

MILLY

She's Rod's family ghost, not mine.

ROD

Yes.

TRIX

What did Lady Anne do, to be a ghost forever after? You promised to tell me.

ROD (*glancing about the hall*)

Now?

TRIX (*with a little giggle*)

At midnight, Rod! Why, that's the time! I love to shiver, really I do.

[*She slides from the arm of her chair into the comfortable depths of it.*]

ROD

You tell her, Milly. I've gone stale on Lady Anne. She used to bore me.

MILLY

It's a long story.

TRIX

All the better!

MILLY (*watching first one and then the other as she talks*)

Lady Anne was a Cavalier nobleman's daughter, and this is where they lived. There was a battle with the Puritans near here, and Cromwell's men killed Lady Anne's father.

TRIX

And what happened to her?

MILLY

Has Rod told you about our secret passage?

TRIX

Oh, no! . . .

MILLY

There is one. It winds through the house and ends in a field more than a mile away. But the tunnel underground — that part of it — crumbled in long ago.

TRIX

Was it open in Lady Anne's time?

MILLY

Yes, she was hiding in it. Then somebody came and said her father was dead, and she gave up escape and returned to the house again.

TRIX

Was Cromwell there?

MILLY

One of his friends, a Puritan, Harley Trenor.

ROD

My ancestor.

TRIX

Was he good to her?

MILLY

Very kind. Then Cromwell confiscated the house and gave it to him. It must have been terrible for Lady Anne. She had no place to go.

TRIX

Harley should have fallen in love with her! . . .

MILLY

That's exactly what he did do! She was so young and gay and beautiful, I suppose even the sternest heart couldn't resist her. And they were married.

TRIX (*dissatisfied at so much joy*)

Well, then.

[*Rod laughs.*]

MILLY

Then it wasn't well. Harley was a Puritan, you see. He couldn't tolerate her ruffles and her curls and her gay little Cavalier manners. For his wife, they wouldn't do. So he made her dress as you are dressed, and stopped her singing and — I fancy — her laughter, too.

TRIX

Did she obey him?

MILLY

Oh, yes, because she loved him.

TRIX

He was a horrid beast.

ROD

The master of his own house.

MILLY

Lady Anne's house. But I think he wasn't to blame then. He only did what was his creed to do. It was after that. . . .

TRIX

After?

MILLY

When she was quite subdued. You see, an old friend, a girl brought up as she had been, came to live with them. Cromwell had imprisoned all her family, and she appealed to Lady Anne for a home.

TRIX

How nice for Harley! Another soul to save!

MILLY

She would have been a good subject — history paints her very frivolous. When she came, Lady Anne's heart ached for her. But nothing happened.

TRIX

Nothing?

MILLY

She ran up and down stairs, and sang, and teased Harley to his face. And the days passed, and were weeks, and still he saw no wrong in the firelight on her curls. Then at last, Lady Anne understood. Gaiety, sunshine needn't be stifled, when they were no concern of his. She had belonged to him; this girl didn't. She stood by and watched him love again, the things he had loved in her.

TRIX

He flirted, right under Lady Anne's nose?

MILLY

It can be done, with the utmost courtesy.

TRIX

And she . . .

MILLY

Lady Anne saw everything, — and pretended to be blind.

ROD

Funny the second sight that people have in stories.

MILLY (*looking up at him with a little smile*)

Isn't it, Rod?

[*He stares at her; then smiles and nods back.*]

ROD

Go on, old girl.

[*At this, Milly smiles again.*]

TRIX (*breaking in*)

Go on, Milly!

MILLY (*pulling herself back into the narrative*)

Ah, — well, — you can imagine that Lady Anne's heart was broken. Thinking of the irony of the situation, hiding her pain, hiding and thinking, she grew bitter. Perhaps a little mad.

ROD

Mad's the word.

TRIX

Why? Why?

MILLY

She made a plan. She went to the Cavalier girl, and told her a secret. It was about a Cavalier who, hunted and starving, lay in the secret passage. She claimed she kept him hidden there, taking him food at midnight. It wasn't true, you know, but the plan she had made. And then she waited.

TRIX

For what?

MILLY

For the Cavalier girl to betray her.

TRIX

Would she do that?

MILLY

Ah, love, you see, has open lips.

ROD

Women.

TRIX

What happened?

MILLY

Night after night, Lady Anne went to the passage. She knew that Harley would follow her when he heard about it. Then the time came. She had seen it in his face. And *that* night. . . .

TRIX

I'm shivering! . . .

MILLY (*pointing up to the left archway*)

Lady Anne came from her room, and through the gallery; and Harley Trenor followed, without noise. Down the stairs — across the hall — to the panels there beyond the fireplace. She went in, and so did he.

TRIX

Did she have a lot of men waiting? . . .

MILLY

There was no one there at all. No one but Lady Anne and Harley Trenor and the blackness. And, in one branch of the tunnel, an open grave dug in the earthen floor.

TRIX (*shivering*)

She killed him herself . . .

MILLY

She came alone from the passage, and went upstairs to her room. And the next morning, they searched in vain for her husband. And the day after that,

and, oh, for many days. But they never knew what had happened, until Lady Anne died. Then she told them.

TRIX

And then did they try to find him?

MILLY

Oh, no, it was years afterward.

TRIX

But I should think they'd have looked, all the same.

ROD (*with a short, uneasy laugh*)

God! You wouldn't, if you'd been there!

TRIX (*crying out with surprise*)

Have you?

ROD

Part way. Only one end is crumbled in, you know. But there are still miles of winding, stifling, dark hole . . . with branches . . . and sudden ends against damp walls . . . and then more . . . a labyrinth. . . .

TRIX (*jumping up*)

Let me look in!

MILLY

Trix!

TRIX

I don't mean *go* in, but I want to see it open! Rod says he can do it, why not? Oh, please, Milly!

ROD (*laughing a bit shakily*)

Lady Anne's ghost may come to meet us.

TRIX (*shivering with delight*)

To say nothing of the husband.

ROD

The husband went to Heaven.

[He goes decisively to the paneling beyond the fireplace, and runs his hand along it.]

TRIX *(joining him, hushed with excitement)*

Rod, you're a darling! . . .

ROD *(his own voice low)*

Haven't done this rum thing for an age. . . . *(His hand grows uncertain and stops. He turns)* I say, Milly, do you remember the trick?

MILLY *(rising)*

I think so.

ROD

You would, being a friend to Lady Anne. Maybe you two have tea in there sometimes!

MILLY *(her voice, also, low and not quite steady)*

Rod! . . .

ROD

Come and open it, will you?

[He yields his place to Milly.]

MILLY *(after a moment's experiment)*

Here it is.

[Under her touch, a narrow door slides open.]

TRIX *(peering over her shoulder)*

Oh, how black. . . . How horrid, horrid black. . . .

ROD

Close it up, Milly.

[She presses another spring, and the panel returns to its place.]

TRIX

Now let me do it! . . .

ROD

You. . . .

TRIX

I'm Lady Anne! Don't you want to see how she looked, when she came down that night?

ROD

I could do without it.

TRIX

Oh, you're frightened! . . .

ROD

I'm not.

TRIX (*begging*)

Show me, Milly! . . .

MILLY

See, then. (*She takes Trix's hand, and guides it along the wood*) Do you feel that? Yes? Now, press on it, toward the left . . . now in. . . .

[*The panel slides open.*]

TRIX

I did it! I did it! (*Milly closes the panel*) Now let me try it alone. . . . (*She feels for the spring, presses it, and opens the entrance*) Milly! . . . Did you see me? I almost want to go in. . . .

[*Stires has come from the dining room, and stands waiting, a few steps into the room.*]

ROD (*suddenly, barely speaking aloud*)

There's some one watching us! . . .

[*For a moment, nobody dares to turn. Then Milly utters a little shaky laugh.*]

MILLY

Lady Anne — is a friend of mine. . . . (*She looks*) It's only Stires!

[*Relieved beyond utterance, they all turn. Then Milly, remembering the panel, closes it.*]

STIRES

Yes, madam. May I speak with you a moment, madam?

MILLY

Certainly. What is it?

[He retreats to the dining-room door, and she follows him. There, he talks in low tones.]

ROD (*watching them, growling*)

What's the matter?

[Milly comes a little way toward them.]

MILLY

I'll be back directly. . . .

[Then she follows Stires into the dining room.]

TRIX

What can he want, this time of night?

ROD

I don't know. I don't care — so long as it means a moment with you.

TRIX (*as he comes close to her*)

Rod, don't, . . . you mustn't!

ROD (*bending over her*)

Why?

TRIX

Milly. . . .

ROD

It's her own fault — she brought you here, didn't she?

TRIX

As Lady Anne did the Cavalier girl. . . .

ROD

Yes. And, you know, all the time she talked, I thought of us.

TRIX

So did I.

ROD

And did you have proper sympathy for Lady Anne?

TRIX (*with a low giggle*)

Not so much as I should have.

ROD (*in hushed glee*)

Nor I! . . .

TRIX

But I don't want Milly to find out, Rod. You must be careful. At the dance, to-night, I thought that people noticed. . . .

ROD

When *can* I talk to you?

TRIX

Any time, only *careful*. . . .

ROD

What good is that? I'll go mad if you don't let me.

I . . . (*An idea comes to him*). See here!

TRIX

What?

ROD

If I can't speak in public, then I must alone with you.

That's fair, isn't it? Fair to us both?

TRIX

And Milly?

ROD

She won't know. She's tired, she'll go straight to bed. Then you come down here and meet me, and we'll chat!

TRIX

Rod. . . .

ROD

What a chat it'll be, — eh?

TRIX

But the servants . . .

ROD

Do you think they prowl about in the dead of night?
No, my dear. We have Lady Anne to thank for that,
at least.

TRIX

I should be frightened, too, . . .

ROD

With me?

TRIX

Oh, Roddy, . . .

ROD

You will, old girl? I'll come and wait for you . . .

TRIX

I . . . (*Milly, followed by Stires, comes back. Seeing her, Trix laughs up at Rod*) I might, and then I mightn't!
[*Milly crosses to them. Stires remains at right.*]

MILLY

It's a perfectly foolish thing, Trix, but I have to tell you. I know you won't be frightened.

TRIX

What?

MILLY

Can you get along with the loan of my maid to-night?

TRIX

Where's mine?

MILLY

In the kitchen. I've just seen her. She cries, and says she won't go upstairs again.

TRIX

Why not?

MILLY (*smiling*)

Oh, — she saw Lady Anne.

TRIX

Lady Anne!

ROD (*in rueful disgust*)

Oh, Lord! Now we'll have hysterics. . . .

MILLY

I'm afraid so. She's awfully frightened. She says that Lady Anne came through the gallery, and passed your open door.

TRIX

But, stuff, Milly, of course she didn't!

MILLY

I know. I tried to tell her. Lady Anne hasn't been seen by any one alive now. The girl was nervous, after dressing you in those white clothes. Perhaps a curtain blew across a gallery window.

ROD

That's it.

TRIX

Of course! But I haven't a maid now.

MILLY

I'll send you mine.

[*Rod looks quickly at Trix, who hesitates.*]

TRIX

No, don't bother. I — I don't like strangers fussing over me. Beside, I still have these clothes on, and you'd lose her, too.

MILLY

As you please. I'm sorry.

TRIX

Let's go to bed!

ROD (*looking at her*)

Frightened?

TRIX (*looking back*)

Not a bit.

MILLY (*going toward the stairs*)

Good night, Stires. You can lock up now.

STIRES

Good night, madam.

[*Milly passes upstairs.*]TRIX (*following her*)

And, Stires! (*He looks up at her as she pauses on the stairs, and she leans down playfully*) If you see Lady Anne, tell her to go away.

STIRES (*stiff with disapproval*)

Very good, miss.

[*Trix goes up, and overtakes Milly in the gallery.*]

ROD

And, Stires, look here, . . .

STIRES

Yes, sir?

ROD

Leave that light by the door — the small one. Every one's nervous, and somebody might come down.

STIRES (*impassive*)

Very good, sir. Good night, sir.

ROD

Good night.

[*He goes upstairs, and disappears along the gallery, after the women, out left.*]

The butler, left alone, goes to the outer door and bolts it. Then he crosses to the fireplace, and draws the chairs back into place, all the while glancing from gallery to panel. Finally, he goes to the door, right, turns off the lights in the chandelier, and, after a last look round, disappears into the dining room. The hall is ruled again by the lantern and the moonlight.

The clock chimes the half-hour. Nothing happens.

Then, at last, in the silence, the white figure of Lady Anne appears in the left archway, crosses the gallery, and comes down the stairs. It pauses, as it goes, to look behind. When it reaches the bottom of the flight, Rod, a dressing gown over the remains of his costume, comes softly from the archway. Leaning over the gallery railing, he sees the figure below him.

ROD (calling softly)

Trix! . . . (His answer is a little challenging wave of the hand. He runs down the stairs, after the figure which, by now, gliding across the hall, has reached the secret door in the panel. Rod speaks, as loudly as he dares) What are you doing — Trix — you little wretch. . . . (Under the white fingers, the panel slides open. Without hesitation, the figure enters the passage and disappears. Rod, half laughing, half nervous and angered, crosses the hall in pursuit) Trix! — I say, — Come back here. . . . (His voice shakes) Little fool. . . . (He plunges into the blackness of the entrance. Again the room is silent for a long space)

[Then a woman, wearing a negligee and holding a lighted candle, comes into the gallery from the left archway, and, crossing it slowly, descends the stairs. Half-way down, her face, in the moon and candle light, be-

comes clearly defined. It is Trix. She reaches the floor, sees no one present, giggles half-nervously, and sits down in a big chair by the fireplace. Snuggling into it, she waits for a moment. Then she peers round at the stairs. Growing impatient, she taps her foot in its white slipper. At last she rises, goes to the stairs, and, looking up, listens for some sound of approaching footsteps. There is none. She turns, pouting, comes back to the chair, and flounces into it angrily. The candle which, on arriving, she has set on the mantel, flickers down on her.

A second woman, without a candle, comes from the archway across the gallery and down the stairs. This is Milly, her face showing very pale and set in the moonlight. She comes so softly that Trix, sitting with her back to her, fails to hear her until she crosses the hall floor. She starts and turns.

TRIX

Milly!

MILLY (*calmly*)

Yes. I heard you go by. Is anything the matter?

TRIX (*forcing a laugh*)

Why, — no, — of course not. (*She gets more control*)

You're tired. You shouldn't have come down.

MILLY

Oh, — I couldn't sleep, myself.

TRIX

Why not?

MILLY (*with a deprecating laugh*)

I suppose it was Lady Anne and the Cavalier girl. . . .

TRIX

I thought of them, too.

MILLY

Weren't you frightened to come down — alone?

TRIX (*laughing also*)

Well, — you know how that secret entrance fascinated me. I — I thought it would be jolly to open it and go in, and tell you all about it in the morning! . . .

MILLY

Go by yourself — at the ghost hour?

TRIX

I'm not a bit afraid of those things. (*Milly turns away, and takes a few steps behind Trix's chair*) Milly, dear, — get some rest. I'm coming to bed myself. You've taken away my courage. The panel. . . .

MILLY (*stopping opposite it*)

You've got it open, haven't you?

TRIX (*surprised*)

No!

MILLY

Look here.

TRIX (*getting up and coming to her*)

I didn't do it, Milly! I wouldn't have dared to!

MILLY

No, I thought not.

TRIX (*after a moment, with a nervous laugh*)

You must have forgotten to close it.

MILLY

When Stires came?

TRIX

Yes! . . . Yes! . . .

MILLY

But I remember sliding it back. . . .

TRIX

I don't! . . .

MILLY

We were all excited. I suppose I forgot. It's queer.
(*She touches the spring, and the panel slides into place*)
There! It's done now.

TRIX

Let's go to bed.

MILLY (*coming back to settle herself in Trix's chair*)

You go. I'm not sleepy.

TRIX

But, Milly, . . .

MILLY (*smiling*)

And I'll tell you something.

TRIX

What?

MILLY

I'm waiting for some one.

TRIX (*forcing her laugh*)

Why, — Milly, — who?

MILLY

Lady Anne.

TRIX (*in a queer tone*)

Oh.

MILLY

If she's really walking about to-night, I'd love to see her. I've always wanted to.

TRIX

But she's upstairs! (*Her coaxing grows more urgent*)
Dearest! . . .

MILLY

Perhaps she will come down.

TRIX

But I. . . .

MILLY

Let's wait together.

TRIX

Oh, . . .

MILLY

A little while. Sit down.

[Trix sits on the other side of the fireplace, facing the gallery.]

TRIX

It's nearly one o'clock. Ghosts never walk after that.

MILLY

No. Are you watching the gallery?

TRIX

Yes — yes, for Lady Anne.

MILLY

Of course. *(A little pause)*

TRIX

It's cold. *(Another pause)*

MILLY

How quickly you took your costume off and washed your face. *(Trix does not answer)* You look very fetching in that robe, Trix.

[Trix stirs in her chair, and Milly smiles. They sit awhile in silence. Then the panel behind them opens without sound, and Lady Anne glides out, returning. Trix sits up, stiff with horror, staring.]

TRIX *(whispering)*

Milly. . . .

[Milly looks up, then follows her gaze. Without moving, they watch, while Lady Anne turns and closes the panel]

behind her. When it is in place, taking no notice of their presence, Lady Anne crosses the floor again, mounts the stairs, and traverses the gallery, to disappear under the archway whence she came.

MILLY (*speaking at last, softly, and without fear*)
Lady Anne.

TRIX (*in a trembling voice*)

Yes. Didn't she look like me. . . . From a distance, no one could. . . . (*Then, quite suddenly, she shrieks with terror*) Oh, — Milly!

[*She gets to her feet wildly. Milly follows suit, vaguely alarmed.*]

MILLY

What is it? . . .

TRIX (*crying with shaking horror*)

Rod! . . . Where's Rod? . . .

MILLY

I don't know . . .

TRIX

He was coming down to meet me! . . .

MILLY (*with growing fright*)

Yes, I know he was! . . .

TRIX

Then why didn't you stop him — why didn't you stop him? . . .

MILLY (*with a little bitter laugh*)

I stop him!

TRIX

Then he wouldn't be lost. . . . (*She fights to regain her calmness*) Perhaps — perhaps he didn't come . . . he's — in his room. . . .

MILLY

He came. I heard him.

TRIX (*her fright returning*)

When?

MILLY

Before you did.

TRIX

Milly, . . . don't say that. . . .

MILLY

Why not? Haven't you seen him?

TRIX

No! . . .

MILLY

Tell me the truth. . . .

TRIX

I haven't seen him, Milly!

MILLY

You oughtn't to frighten me — just to protect yourself.

TRIX

But the panel was open. . . .

MILLY

Rod didn't open it, he's forgotten how. . . .

TRIX

But Lady Anne. . . .

MILLY

She wouldn't do that! She wouldn't take him away!

TRIX

Yes, she might. . . .

MILLY

Why?

TRIX

You know why, Milly, — she's killed a man for that — before. . . .

MILLY

Because you. . . .

TRIX

We only meant to talk — but she wouldn't know — would she? . . .

MILLY

So she — you think she — killed — Rod?

TRIX

Yes — in that black hole — I know she did — he thought he was following me — and he went in there — and he's lying there now — somewhere — Oh, for God's sake, Milly, *do* something! . . .

MILLY

You do something! . . .

TRIX

I. . . .

MILLY

You've done this — whatever happened. You — it was you who sent him in there — if he's dead. . . .

TRIX

No, Milly! — Oh, no . . . no — no —

MILLY

You go — and open that panel . . . and find Rod.

TRIX (*shivering and moaning*)

I — can't. . . .

MILLY

You learned to do it. Go and meet him, then! . . . He wants you. . . . Why should *I* bring him back to you? — I'm *glad* if he's dead! Glad. . . . (*She*

bursts into hysterical laughter) Why should I go? He isn't waiting for me — in there. . . .

[Then she calms down, staring straight before her.

TRIX *(moaning without cease)*

I can't. . . . I can't. . . .

MILLY *(suddenly, in the plaintive voice of a little child)*

I want Rod. He's mine.

TRIX

I didn't know it would happen. . . .

MILLY

Rod — I want him.

TRIX

I didn't mean any harm. . . .

MILLY *(recalled to her)*

Perhaps you didn't. I'll go with you.

TRIX *(shivering)*

Where? . . .

MILLY

To find him.

TRIX

No. . . .

MILLY

Take the candle. Hurry.

TRIX

I'm frightened, I'm frightened, I'm frightened, . . .

MILLY *(taking the candle)*

Then come behind me. . . .

TRIX *(cowering down)*

No. . . . Milly. . . . not in there . . . don't make me. . . .

MILLY

But Rod's there. Don't you love him?

TRIX

I don't want him to die. . . .

MILLY

Maybe we can save him. . . .

TRIX

Oh . . . no. . . . We couldn't find him . . . we can't find him, Milly! . . . (*She clutches at her*)
Don't go, Milly, it's *dark* in there! . . .

MILLY

Let me alone — I'm going to find Rod — I want him. . . .

TRIX (*holding her back with shaking hands*)

Milly. . . . (*Then there comes a wild knocking on the panels. Shocked into silence, they stand, tense, listening. Trix has released Milly, who turns and takes a step. Trix shrieks in a new fear*) Don't . . . don't . . . don't . . . ! . . .

[*The knocking continues, now louder, now fainter.*

[*Milly runs to the panels, and Trix, wild with terror, scuttles for the stairs. There she crouches, while Milly opens the passage door. Rod, deathly white, exhausted, stifling, falls forward on his knees at her feet.*

ROD (*clinging to her like a child*)

Milly. . . . Milly. . . .

[*Looking down at him tenderly, she reaches out and closes the panel. Then she looks over at Trix.*

MILLY (*very quietly*)

Good night, Trix

TRIX (*fighting for control of her shaking voice*)

Good night, — Milly.

[*She turns and goes upstairs, slowly, and with uneven steps.*

ROD (*without raising his head*)

Oh, — Milly. . . .

MILLY

There. Let me sit down. (*She reaches for a chair beside her, pulls it up, and sits down. Then she rests his head in her lap, and strokes it*) That's better.

[*Gradually, his breath comes more normally, and his hands stop twitching. He begins to speak, jerkily.*]

ROD (*with effort*)

I went a long way — without catching her. And when she turned — she had no — eyes. And then when I — looked again — she was gone. I tried to find my way back — and, oh, — it was so *hard*. . . .

(*He pauses, and then goes on in a deeper tone*)

Milly — you know — in there — I kept thinking about you — you — over and over again — somehow. . . . Well, it was you I wanted to see again — understand? — if I got out. . . . (*He shivers, reaches up, and takes her stroking hand*) Don't stop — touching me, Milly. . . .

MILLY (*very gently*)

No, I won't.

ROD

I do love you. . . . (*There is a little pause*)

MILLY (*raising her face, transfigured*)

Thank you, — Lady Anne.

[*The tall old clock strikes one. Which is the reason that Lady Anne does not answer her.*]

CURTAIN

SANTA CLAUS
A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

BILLY
MRS. BROWN
JERVIS
MRS. JERVIS
BARBARA
A CHILD

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SANTA CLAUS

SCENE: *The toy department of a large store. The corner near the buyer's desk is an irregular triangle of space. On the right, the long side of the angle is broken at the back by a wide doorway leading outward to an iron staircase. Below this, a square of floor is partly railed off against the wall. Within this enclosure are a desk, two chairs, and a hatrack. Above the desk hangs a large commercial calendar bearing the date DEC. 24. On the left, the short side of the angle is taken up by one end of the doll counter, an aisle running out of sight before and behind it. Big and little dolls of many makes are on display, with a doll dressed like a cabaret dancer prominently featured.*

As the curtain rises, a quite young man, of indeterminate and sheepish appearance, appears from the staircase reluctantly. He looks toward the buyer's desk, sees no one there, and slows his walk to even more reluctance. As he crosses down right past the desk, he begins to divest himself of his shabby overcoat. And he speaks, in a deep and helpless disgust.

BILLY

Aw, gee, — Santy Claus. . . . (He is almost out, when the telephone on the buyer's desk begins to ring. He pauses and eyes it questioningly. It rings again. He enters the enclosure, and, still standing, takes up the instrument) Hello. — Yeah, Jervis Store, Toy

Department. — Who, me? One of the clerks. . . . No, the buyer ain't come in yet. . . . I said, the — buyer — ain't — come — in — yet. . . . Well, don't be so excited, then you could hear me better. Sure, she ain't in, but she's due any minute. . . . Yeah, Mrs. Brown, that's still her name, what'd you think she was, married again at her age? . . . The store don't open till eight-thirty, but she'll come earlier to-day, because. . . . What? What say? Any message? Hey — hello — hello. . . . (*There enters from the staircase a motherly-looking, well-dressed, elderly woman. He puts the telephone down, and sees her*) Oh, say, Mrs. Brown, that's too bad now. A guy just wanted to get you on the 'phone.

MRS. BROWN (*in mild surprise*)

Did he, Billy? Was there a message?

BILLY

Naw, when I asked him, he hung up. He sounded like a nut, awful worked up over somethin'!

MRS. BROWN

Are you sure? Now, I think *you're* so worked up, you don't hear straight.

BILLY

Well, why wouldn't I be, playin' Santy Claus for a week. . . .

MRS. BROWN (*not too sympathetic*)

Poor boy. . . .

BILLY

All them hot stuffin's inside me — and the kids gawkin' and makin' me feel so foolish. . . .

MRS. BROWN (*laughing in spite of herself*)

Oh, dear me. . . .

BILLY

Yesterday, fifteen little girls asked if they could kiss me! And, from that, my false whiskers got to workin' up on one ear, and me talkin' crooked to keep along with 'em. . . . (*He bends himself backward in the attitude of corpulence, and speaks in a deep, jovial voice*) Are you a good little girl? What do you want for Christmas? (*Then, in a natural tone*) Gee whiz — mush —

MRS. BROWN (*laughing*)

But you look so beautiful. . . .

BILLY

Yes, laugh. I'll never clerk in a toy department again — not on your life, I won't. . . . If you wasn't an old friend of my mother's, Mrs. Brown, gee, I'd. . . .

MRS. BROWN

If I wasn't, I wouldn't care whether you made a success or not. Cheer up, Billy! It's the last day before Christmas. And now run along and get into your clothes.

BILLY

It's bad enough doin' it the regular time, without a half-hour extra to-day. . . .

MRS. BROWN

Oh, Billy, . . .

BILLY (*with deep bitterness*)

I've got to be on private exhibition for the owner's dear little granddaughter.

MRS. BROWN

She *is* a dear, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. . . .

BILLY

Well, why can't she come and look at me along with the other kids? Who's she, anyhow?

MRS. BROWN

She's a delicate little thing, and her mother's afraid of this epidemic that's around among the children, so. . . .

BILLY

Oh, yeah, I know! Gee, her mother! Afraid to let her mix with the common herd, I guess. She makes me sick, young Mrs. Jervis does. I've heard 'em talk about her. Felt so disgraced because she married the rich son of a *storekeeper*. La de da — la de da! I don't blame her husband for gettin' a divorce! . . .

MRS. BROWN

Don't talk that way.

BILLY

Well, didn't he?

MRS. BROWN (*with reluctance*)

No. She got a divorce from him.

BILLY (*unbeaten*)

Well, suppose she did. Why was it? I bet she drove him to the drink and the girls and all the rest of it!

MRS. BROWN

You don't know anything about it.

BILLY

Gee, no, p'raps I don't. I've only waited on her once since I come here to work, and I never saw him; but I've heard the girls talkin' about him, them as worked

here last year when he did. And there isn't a one of 'em wouldn't have given her head for a smile from him. . . .

MRS. BROWN (*reminiscently*)

And there probably isn't a one he didn't smile at. . . .

BILLY

Why not, they're a good-lookin' bunch! (*Mrs. Brown turns away to hide her own smile*) Say, honest, now, Mrs. Brown, — all the other girls fell for him, — didn't you?

MRS. BROWN

Don't ask questions. . . . Small wonder they fell for him, — the dear boy's face of him, and all that charm. Things came too easy to young Mr. Jervis. His father was so proud of him then — he knew the people in the store just idolized him.

BILLY

Where is he now?

MRS. BROWN

I don't know. He left the city, months back, with the woman he was in love with. It doesn't seem like the day before Christmas at all, without young Mr. Jervis here. (*She bends a stern look on Billy*) And that reminds me. . . .

BILLY (*leaning against the railing*)

I'll go in a minute. Tell me, what'd he do?

MRS. BROWN (*taking off her coat and hat, and hanging them up*)

Two years ago, when little Miss Barbara was four, he had her come down to meet Santa Claus. Her mother wanted Santa at home for her, but he wouldn't hear to it. He loved to have it happen in

the store, and her standing in line with all the other children. Mrs. Jervis used to bring her in at noon, on the twenty-fourth.

BILLY

Noon, huh?

MRS. BROWN (*coming outside the enclosure*)

Yes. And early that morning, both years, young Mr. Jervis would come down before the store opened. Before he went to his father's office, he'd come and say to me, "Brownie," — that's what he called me, Brownie, — "I want to give my little Barby the most wonderful toy in the world! Brownie, what's the most wonderful toy for a tiny bit of a girl?" And then we'd go through the department, and he'd like to beggar himself. . . .

BILLY

He loved the kid?

MRS. BROWN

Oh, yes!

BILLY

But the papers said her mother wouldn't let him see her. Gosh, if he felt like that, honest, Mrs. Brown, I should think even that frozen-faced young Mrs. Fossil. . . . (*During this speech, a tall young man carrying a suitcase has come in by the stairs, and stands in the entrance looking silently at them. Mrs. Brown becomes aware of him, looks again, stares for one petrified second, and then touches Billy gently on the arm*)
Huh? . . .

MRS. BROWN (*with more emotion in her voice than the occasion warrants*)

Run along now. There's a gentleman here who has

an appointment with me. (*Billy glances curiously at the stranger*) Run along and get dressed.

BILLY (*going*)

All right.

[*He disappears, out, right. When he is quite gone, the young man, with a quick, nervous motion, comes down to the enclosure, setting his bag down on the floor beside it. He has a rather beautiful, wistful, not too strong face.*]

THE YOUNG MAN

Brownie. . . .

MRS. BROWN (*giving him both her hands, but speaking with reproach*)

You shouldn't have come, sir.

JERVIS (*miserably, but with defiance*)

Why not? I couldn't get you by telephone. I had to.

MRS. BROWN

You know what day it is.

JERVIS

Of course I do. That's why I came. (*Then, blurting it out*) I want to see her, Brownie. She's my child.

MRS. BROWN

Haven't you seen her all this time?

JERVIS

No. I agreed with her mother, it was better for me not to.

MRS. BROWN

Then — Oh, I don't like to say it, sir — but how can I let you stay here? You see, there's a children's epidemic, and Mrs. Jervis is bringing Barbara down at eight o'clock, so she won't run any risk. . . .

JERVIS (*with a short laugh*)

Risk? Of kidnapping?

MRS. BROWN

Of the epidemic.

JERVIS (*looking at his watch*)

I see. In five minutes. Barby — in five minutes.

MRS. BROWN

You didn't come — with kidnapping in your mind — did you, Mr. Jervis?

JERVIS (*whirling on her*)

You must think I love Barby, to take her off into the kind of life I'm living now!

MRS. BROWN (*searching his face*)

That's on the square?

JERVIS (*meeting her look*)

Square, Brownie. You go to the movies too much.

MRS. BROWN (*with a sigh of relief*)

I was frightened for a minute.

[*Suddenly and radiantly, he smiles at her.*]

JERVIS

You dear old thing, you know I'm rotten, but you know I love Barby — you know that, don't you, Brownie?

MRS. BROWN

Yes, I do.

JERVIS

You remember this day two years ago — and last year. . . .

MRS. BROWN

Now, Mr. Jervis, don't. . . .

JERVIS

I can't help it. Because, you see, in memory of that,

I've chucked all my good resolutions, and you're going to let me stay. And you won't get caught, either. I promise you. And neither shall I, but I'll — see — Barby. . . .

MRS. BROWN

How?

JERVIS (*indicating his person and making a little bow*)
Santa Claus!

MRS. BROWN (*alarmed*)

Oh! . . . No. . . .

JERVIS

Why not?

MRS. BROWN

I don't know . . . they'd recognize you. . . .

JERVIS

Barby won't. You know what awful jokes get by as Santa Claus . . . she won't, unless I tell her. . . .

MRS. BROWN

You couldn't do that, anyway.

JERVIS

I couldn't. No. All right.

MRS. BROWN

What about — Mrs. Jervis?

JERVIS

Well — you'd talk to her, wouldn't you, Brownie?

MRS. BROWN

I. . . .

JERVIS

Just for a few minutes?

MRS. BROWN

Oh, I oughtn't. . . .

JERVIS

I swear I won't tell Barby — or run away with her. . . .

MRS. BROWN

Yes, yes, I know, sir. . . .

JERVIS

Brownie, you always were the best old sport. . . .

MRS. BROWN

You stop wheedling me.

JERVIS

Then give in, won't you please? You see, it's more than likely I don't get another chance. Next year, Barby'll probably be too old to believe in Santa Claus. She'll be seven. Her mother won't keep it up till it gets ridiculous. Then I couldn't manage to talk to Barby any more. You see — Brownie — by next year — it probably won't matter so much — to me — whether I do or not. Perhaps it won't. Oh, yes, undoubtedly. But now — well — I've come a long way, Brownie — because it seemed — I'd got to. . . .

MRS. BROWN

You poor thing. (*She makes up her mind*) All right, Mr. Jervis, you go ahead and try it!

JERVIS

May I? . . .

MRS. BROWN

If you'll be careful, sir.

JERVIS

I will be! I never lose my head, you know, except at celebrations. This won't be exactly a celebration, will it, Brownie? . . . But we'll do the best we can.

MRS. BROWN

Yes, and now you'd better get ready.

JERVIS

Just a minute! I've got to give her a present. Mrs. Jervis requested me not to send any. Guess she was right, too; the sooner I'm forgotten. . . . But Santa Claus can do it, that's all right! (*He whirls round in eager survey of the counters*) 'What's the most wonderful thing in the store? (*His bitterness momentarily gone, he laughs boyishly*) What'll I give her, Brownie?

[*She looks at him, then shakes her head, reaches across to her desk, takes therefrom a little pile of thin booklets, and detaches one from the pile.*]

MRS. BROWN (*holding it out to him*)

This.

JERVIS (*his glee fading*)

What's that?

MRS. BROWN (*in a firm tone, her expression pitying*)

The thing for you to give Miss Barbara.

JERVIS (*reading over her shoulder*)

"The animals, two by two,
Arrived with old man Noah,
Straight from the ark to you
In Jervis' Toyland Store." . . .

Why, that's the advertising booklet we give all the children. That's no present! That's no thing for Barby!

MRS. BROWN

I can't help it. Now, you stop to think. If Santa Claus gave Miss Barbara something awful expensive, wouldn't that look queer?

JERVIS

He always did.

MRS. BROWN

That was you.

JERVIS (*uncertainly*)

My father might have. . . .

MRS. BROWN

No, sir, they've all forgotten to do it.

JERVIS (*at last*)

All right, that's gone.

MRS. BROWN (*holding out the booklet*)

This is better than nothing. . . .

JERVIS (*cramming it in his coat pocket*)

Oh, damn.

MRS. BROWN (*consulting her watch*)

It's five minutes past eight.

JERVIS (*startled out of his sulks*)

Good Lord! . . . Where'll I find the rig?

MRS. BROWN

Down in the sample room by the back staircase.
You'll find another Santa, too, — but he won't know
who you are.

JERVIS

All right, Brownie, you're a brick. . . . (*He starts off, then turns and comes back; and seizing her by the shoulders, kisses her with a frantic and hearty haste*)
Merry Christmas! . . .

[*He runs off, right. Mrs. Brown stands looking after him, half in tears, half smiling, rubbing her cheek.*

Then she looks at her watch again, and glances surreptitiously behind her at the stairs. As the effect of Jervis' presence wears off, her perturbation grows. She

goes inside the enclosure, seats herself at her desk, and endeavors to look busy. In two seconds, she is on her feet again. She comes outside the railing, and sees Jervis' suitcase. Helplessly, she picks it up, and is holding it as Billy dashes in from the right. Billy has not hurried. He has only reached the state of disguise which consists in shirt sleeves and a large pillow tied about his waist in front with cord. In his excitement, however, he has forgotten the pillow.

MRS. BROWN (*faced with this apparition*)

Good gracious!

BILLY

Gee whiz, Mrs. Brown, who's that guy, anyhow?

MRS. BROWN (*badly flustered*)

Why, — that's — Santa Claus. . . .

BILLY

Yeah, I know. For an hour. He gave me five dollars to let him. I didn't wait to hear no more; I just came straight to you. And this is what I think — he's a kidnapper!

MRS. BROWN

Oh! No . . . no, he isn't.

BILLY

Are you sure? It looks awful fishy to me.

MRS. BROWN

Well, it's none of your business — you go to the movies too much. . . .

BILLY

The kid's comin' — and there he is.

MRS. BROWN (*valiantly*)

That man — is a — toy manufacturer. He wants to ask an hour's worth of children what they like best

for Christmas. So he can find out at first hand what toys to manufacture.

BILLY (*disappointed*)

Oh, I see.

MRS. BROWN

He just got the idea this morning, and as soon as he got it, he telephoned. . . .

BILLY

Oh, *that* guy!

MRS. BROWN

And I said I would let him. You tell him what to say. And here's his sample case! — Take it in to him, will you?

[*Billy takes the suitcase, but his hope dies hard.*]

BILLY

Sure! But I'll tell you one thing, Mrs. Brown, much as I hate bein' Santy Claus, I don't want no foul play done. So I'll just hang around, see . . . (*Mrs. Jervis and Barbara enter from the staircase. The mother is elegantly severe, affecting a pallor of skin set off by dark furs. Barbara's little face has her father's prettiness and her mother's primness. She comes forward, with fascinated eyes on Billy, who, quite unconscious, talks on*) . . . and keep an eye on your friend the toy manufacturer, and if — he — tries — anything — funny. . . . (*He has struck a heroic attitude much out of key with the pillow. Suddenly he sees the child staring at him, and the elegant figure in the background*) Oh, gee whiz! . . .

[*And he turns and flees with the suitcase.*]

BARBARA

Why did the man have a pillow tied on him?

MRS. JERVIS (*with an embarrassed laugh*)

Good morning, Mrs. Brown.

MRS. BROWN (*too embarrassed for any laugh*)

Good morning. My, how Miss Barbara's grown!
(*She stoops down to the child*) Do you remember me,
dear?

BARBARA

Oh, yes, you're Brownie, aren't you?

MRS. JERVIS

Say "Mrs. Brown," Barbara.

BARBARA

Don't you like to be called Brownie any more?

MRS. BROWN

You must do as your mother says.

BARBARA (*smugly*)

I try to. Because if I don't, Santa Claus won't. . . .
Where is he?

MRS. BROWN

He. . . . Oh, he'll be here any minute.

BARBARA

I suppose it takes so long to arrive from the North
Pole.

MRS. BROWN

Yes, that's it, dear.

MRS. JERVIS (*looking after Billy*)

It occurs to me that he hasn't hurried very much.

BARBARA

Does he understand that it's mother who's waiting?

MRS. BROWN

Santa knows everything.

BARBARA

Because it makes such a difference with most people.

MRS. BROWN

He'll be right out. . . . I mean, in.

BARBARA (*laughing suddenly, all child*)

There's no chimney, so he uses the elevator shaft!

MRS. BROWN (*touched*)

How she remembers!

[*Mrs. Jervis looks at her and walks away.*]

BARBARA

Did that man have a stomach ache?

MRS. BROWN

Who?

BARBARA

The one with the pillow.

MRS. JERVIS (*turning back*)

Nonsense, Barbara.

BARBARA

Well, I don't know. Once I looked out of our window and saw that bad boy across the street after he'd got a spanking. And he had a pillow, too, only his was. . . .

MRS. JERVIS

Barbara, Mrs. Brown isn't interested.

MRS. BROWN (*moving hastily to the counter*)

Come here, dear, and let me show you the newest dolly. (*Barbara follows her, and Mrs. Brown picks up one of the little cabaret dolls*) Isn't that cunning?

MRS. JERVIS

A cabaret dancer?

MRS. BROWN

Yes. Aren't they natural as life?

MRS. JERVIS

I suppose so. But, really, Mrs. Brown, — do you think them exactly — fit — for children?

MRS. BROWN

I don't see. . . .

MRS. JERVIS

Of course, I know nothing about the doll trade. But it seems to me that the underlying idea is immoral.

MRS. BROWN

What? — Oh, I see. — Well, now, Mrs. Jervis, I never even thought of such a thing. Children don't get back to underlying ideas. The dolls are so pretty and roguish, and their fluffy dresses take the eye so. They're proving a best seller. . . .

MRS. JERVIS

I daresay. For little boys to play with.

MRS. BROWN (*helplessly*)

I don't know, I'm sure.

BARBARA

Why do little boys want to play with them?

MRS. JERVIS

You see. It puts the idea in her head. (*She stoops to straighten the child's hat, and Mrs. Brown sets the doll back on the counter*) Mother was just joking, Barbara.

BARBARA

I couldn't tell, because you didn't smile. (*Jervis, padded to rotundity, clad in white-edged crimson, and decorated with long white whiskers, has come a little way in, at the right, and stands watching them. Barbara, pulling away from her mother's straightening hand, perceives him there*) Oh, Santa Claus!
[*She stands looking at him shyly, and he does not move or speak.*]

MRS. BROWN

Mrs. Jervis — don't you think — she's bashful if we stay with her? Let's go down the aisle a way; there's a toy church I want to show you. . . .

MRS. JERVIS

The young man we saw when we came in seemed a very nice young man.

MRS. BROWN (*realizing that the fates are with her*)

Oh, I know his family — I got him the job myself!

MRS. JERVIS

Barbara. . . . (*The child turns*) It's very late. Santa was so long in coming, you can only talk to him five minutes. (*She disappears behind the counter, left, with Mrs. Brown, talking as she goes*) A church would complete a doll town very nicely. . . .

[*Barbara, her mother gone, smiles at Santa Claus. He smiles back. Then she goes near him, and puts out her hand politely.*]

JERVIS

Well — hello — Barby. . . .

[*They shake hands.*]

BARBARA

You know me better than you did last year, you called me Barbara then.

JERVIS

Did I? . . . Oh, I know you much better this year; you've been such a good girl! That's the idea, isn't it? (*His tone sobers*) You've grown, too, a lot.

BARBARA

I don't see how you can remember, with all the children in the world.

JERVIS

Well — I'm a pretty wise old bird! . . . (*He reaches over into the enclosure, lifts out a chair which he places in the aisle, and sits down*) Come and sit on my knee a minute, Barby.

BARBARA

Right on your beautiful suit?

JERVIS

It won't hurt it.

BARBARA

I never heard of any one sitting on Santa Claus before. (*She comes to him, and lets him lift her up*) Do you take little girls on your lap very often?

JERVIS

I — I have.

BARBARA (*settling down at her ease*)

I remember you, too, quite well. I remember your voice.

JERVIS (*alarmed*)

Do you?

BARBARA

Oh, yes. But last year you had a little house to go into.

JERVIS

I haven't any house this year.

BARBARA

No. All the children can see you at once. Isn't it too bad so many children are sick?

JERVIS

Yes.

BARBARA

Do you go in their houses, just the same, when they're quadruped?

JERVIS

Quarantined, darling.

BARBARA

I suppose you do.

JERVIS

Oh, yes. But let's not talk about them. Let's talk about you.

BARBARA

I haven't been sick. Are people sick in other places?

JERVIS

Yes, I imagine so.

BARBARA

Far-off places? Way, away off?

JERVIS

Yes. Why?

BARBARA

I'm afraid my daddy is sick.

[There is a long pause.]

JERVIS (*uncertainly*)

Why, Barby. . . .

BARBARA

He isn't expected home, but I thought he might come for Christmas. Did you ever see him on your travels, Santa Claus?

JERVIS

Yes. Yes, I saw him, and I said, "I'm bound for the Jervis Store; what'll I tell Barby?" And he said, "Tell my little girl I love her and love her and . . ." *[Billy, dressed for the street, has entered, down right, and wanders past them grinning.]*

BILLY

Hello, Mr. Santy, like your job?

[He winks at Jervis and disappears by the stairs.]

JERVIS *(trying to take up his inspiration again)*

He said. . . .

BARBARA *(in a tone of pleased surprise)*

Why, that's the man that had the pillow on!

JERVIS

What? — Oh — did he?

BARBARA

Yes. I wonder where he left it.

JERVIS *(indistinctly, into his whiskers)*

Huh. . . .

BARBARA

Did he have it on to make him comfortable?

JERVIS

No! No, I don't think so. *(He turns her face up to his)* But, Barby, we were talking, don't you remember. . . .

BARBARA *(smiling up at him)*

What?

JERVIS

You wanted — you said . . . you . . . *(Suddenly he bends down, very close to her)* Look, dear, look at me, I. . . .

BARBARA

Your whiskers tickle. *(He throws back his head abruptly, sets her down, and, rising, strides away from her. She follows him over to the counter, anxious)* I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Santa Claus. They're such beautiful whiskers. . . .

JERVIS *(smiling down at her with effort)*

Here, let's look at the toys. I made 'em all, you know, every one of 'em. What do you like best?

(He picks up the cabaret doll, and grins at it) Pretty nice, this one? *(Chuckling, he turns it round on his hand)* Isn't that good, what?

BARBARA *(laughing because it is a joke)*

All the little boys like to play with it! *(He looks at her, and suddenly, with a violent motion, sets the doll back on the counter. She fidgets on one foot)* So, of course, you wouldn't give that to a girl like me.

JERVIS *(vaguely)*

No. . . .

BARBARA

You brought me perfectly lovely things last Christmas.

JERVIS

Yes. . . . Oh! — er . . . *(He hesitates, then slowly pulls the booklet from his pocket)* Here's a — a little present for you, Barby. . . .

[With bent head, he makes his offering. She takes it from him and runs through it gleefully.]

BARBARA *(in deep delight)*

Oh, Santa Claus! At last you let me have one!

JERVIS

Let you. . . .

BARBARA

I saw all the other children get one, but you never gave one to me.

JERVIS

Did you want it?

BARBARA

Every single child but me had one. And they're the cunningest little books I ever saw. People always give me great big heavy ones. . . . That's a beautiful two elephants. What does it say about them?

JERVIS (*reading*)

“The animals, two by two,
Arrived with old man Noah,
Straight from the ark to you,
In. . . .”

(*Ashamed to confess the book's commercialism, he hesitates, looks down into her eager little face, then gets it over with*) . . . “Jervis' Toyland Store.” . . .

BARBARA (*as if the heavens had fallen*)

They picked out *our* store to come to! (*She skips pridefully in the aisle*) Don't you think that's wonderful, Santa Claus?

JERVIS (*laughing with boyish gaiety*)

Yes! There's an elephant over here in the center aisle — want to look at him?

BARBARA

Oh, *yes!* . . .

[*He picks her up in his arms, and is striding off, right, with her, as Billy comes back.*]

BILLY (*realizing the worst*)

Hey! Where — you — two — going?

[*Jervis stops as if shot, and sets Barbara down.*]

BARBARA (*indignant*)

To look at my grandfather's elephant.

[*Mrs. Jervis and Mrs. Brown return from behind the counter.*]

MRS. JERVIS

Come, Barbara.

[*Barbara looks at her, but does not go.*]

JERVIS (*low, almost to himself*)

I — I haven't said. . . .

MRS. JERVIS

Barbara.

[Mrs. Brown crosses quickly to the child, and, stooping, touches her gently.]

MRS. BROWN

The five minutes are gone, dear, it's half-past eight.
Run back to your mother. . . .

BARBARA

Yes. But there's something Santa hasn't said. *(She turns back to the man, who is looking and looking at her)*

What was it, Santa Claus?

[He is looking so hard, it seems that he has not heard her. Mrs. Brown takes a quick step to his side.]

MRS. BROWN *(gently, but with warning)*

What was it?

[Jervis turns and meets her look, and slowly nods in comprehension. With his eyes still on Mrs. Brown, and misery in his voice, he says the first thing that occurs to him.]

JERVIS

Merry Christmas. . . .

BARBARA

Oh! The same to you. I'll see you next year, won't I?

He nods, speechless. Barbara puts out her hand. Again they shake hands solemnly.

MRS. JERVIS

Barbara.

BARBARA *(skipping across to her)*

Here I am! There's an elephant out in the big aisle.
Can we look at it?

MRS. JERVIS

Another time. It's late. Come, we'll go down the stairs.

[They pass Billy, and reach the staircase entrance.]

BARBARA (*smug once more*)

Well, anyhow, I have the loveliest book, with elephants, about the store in poetry. . . .

[They disappear. Jervis has taken a few steps after them, and stands near center, looking where they have gone. Billy before him and Mrs. Brown behind him are watching him; but he is oblivious to both of them in his utter wretchedness.]

The store has opened. A very small child, wrapped in an enormous cast-down coat, comes timidly up the aisle from behind the counter, and plants itself before Santa Claus with open mouth and round eyes and the dumb hope of a condescending word. Jervis has no idea that the little figure is there. Presently, Billy begins to make signs to him. Vaguely, he realizes that there is something to be looked at. Lowering his eyes, he sees the pathetic child. He stirs, and wets his lips.]

JERVIS (*trying to do his duty*)

Well, . . . (*Billy prompts him in dumb show. He rouses, bends himself backward, and speaks in a deep, jovial voice*) Well! — Are you a good girl? What do you want for Christmas?

CURTAIN

THE PLAYROOM
A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

First Produced in Cambridge, Mass., by the 47 Workshop, on March 7 and 8, 1919.

CHARACTERS

LISBETH

FANNY

ETHEL

THOMAS

CECILY

ROGER

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THE PLAYROOM

SCENE: *Interior of a stable belonging to a city house. The door is in the center, back, closed. One little window is placed quite low in the right wall. All the woodwork is dark, and the light from this one window is much obscured by many embroideries of dust. There is no vehicle of any kind in the place; but, instead, everywhere is furniture, furniture covered with cotton slips, and some merely with pieces of brown sacking. Over the tops of two stalls built out from the left wall protrude the stacked-up legs of chairs. Under the window is a sideboard. The rest of the right-hand stage is taken up by a table, with a rocker and two small chairs, all covered, drawn up round it.*

TIME: *About the end of the War.*

At curtain-rise, we see the dim interior. If there is more light in any one place than elsewhere, it is on the rocker, where a very small girl sits rocking a large doll. This child looks about six years old. She is ideally beautiful, the kind of baby all women plan to have, but none of them quite attains. Even her clothes and the doll partake of this exquisite unreality. In a sweet voice, she is humming "Rockabye, Baby."

Then the dusty window is cautiously opened; and another child crawls through, dropping easily to the top of the sideboard, and thence to the floor. It is a pretty little girl of six, with wind-blown hair and substantial, rumpled clothes. She, too, has a doll, of diminutive size and much handled appearance. She stares at the first child.

THE NEWCOMER

Oh, I never saw *you* before! Who are you?

THE CHILD IN THE CHAIR

I am Lisbeth.

THE NEWCOMER

My name's Fanny.

LISBETH

I have a cousin Fanny.

FANNY

I haven't got any cousins. (*She comes nearer, staring at Lisbeth*) What are you doing in here?

LISBETH

I live here.

FANNY

You do not! This is my playroom.

LISBETH

This is my room.

FANNY (*kneeling on the little chair opposite*)

I'll tell you what it is. It's my father's barn, really. And he manufactures guns, and he'd shoot you if he knew. How can you live in my father's barn?

LISBETH

My daddy's house is here.

FANNY

Do you mean the chairs and tables and things? *Those* aren't my father's. They belong to my Auntie Cecily. But she's an old maid and hasn't got any children, so they're not yours.

LISBETH (*with gentle insistence*)

I live in them.

FANNY

Why, you don't, either! Aunt Cecily keeps the barn locked up all the time, and I'm the only one that ever found the window. And I come in almost every day, but I never saw you before.

LISBETH

I've seen you.

FANNY

When?

LISBETH

All the times that you came. You'd sit down on the chairs and talk to visitors; but you never spoke to me. Once you looked my way, and I thought you would; but you said, "Yes, Mrs. Brown, I went to the bargain sale." And that isn't my name.

FANNY

Why didn't you say something to me?

LISBETH

I did call to you, but you never heard.

FANNY

I'd like to know, how you could sit right there, and me not see or hear!

LISBETH

P'raps it's because you always came in the morning when there was more light.

FANNY

Yes, I did, but that's nonsense. I could see you a great deal better. And I think you're a big fibber, Lisbeth Whatsyourname!

LISBETH (*patiently*)

Then maybe I was in one of the other rooms, putting my baby to sleep.

FANNY

Those are stalls, and they don't look a bit like rooms, the furniture is all piled up in them.

LISBETH

My mother says they are rooms.

FANNY

Have you got a mother, too? Oh, you're just playing house like I am, — aren't you?

LISBETH

I have a mother, and my daddy comes home from work at sunset, every day.

FANNY

It's nearly sunset now.

LISBETH

Yes, I'm waiting for him.

FANNY

Right here, in this barn?

LISBETH

Oh, yes! Mother always comes first, and then. . . .
[*There is a sound of some one at the door. Fanny jumps down.*]

FANNY

Ooh! There's Aunt Cecily coming, and she'll be awful angry if she finds us! Let's us hide — quick!
[*She runs into the stalls. But Lisbeth gets down from her chair, smiling.*]

LISBETH (*softly*)

Mother! . . .

[*As the key grates in the lock, a man's voice is heard, raised in impatience. Lisbeth turns and goes slowly into the stall. The door creaks into its groove. Afternoon*]

sunlight pours into the barn, lighting up all its incongruities. A man and woman enter from the driveway.

THOMAS

You see! The barn's as musty as an old tomb.

ETHEL

That's what it is, Tom. The tomb of Cecily's hopes.

THOMAS (*grunting*)

Um. . . . It's darned inconvenient, burying your hopes in a stable.

ETHEL

. Yes, but . . .

THOMAS

Stables were built for more practical things.

ETHEL

My dear, . . .

THOMAS

You know I'm right, Ethel.

ETHEL

Yes, but, after all, she's my sister, and I *do* feel for her. Why, I seemed just like a burglar, taking the key from her room.

THOMAS

Nonsense! We've got as much right to the place as she has. Or anyhow, *you* ought to have. Your father left the property to both of you alike.

ETHEL

I know; but she's made it sacred.

THOMAS

She's made a little fool of herself, if you ask me. Roger wasn't as crazy about *her* as all that. Don't tell me a man in love will go to war when his own country's neutral, just because his parents happened

to be French. Yet *he* went gallivanting off, at the very start of things.

ETHEL

No matter what *he* thought, it's Cecily I. . . .

THOMAS

Now, look here, Ethel. I hate to be unfeeling; and I'm willing to suppose you can mourn for a fiancé as much as you would a husband. But when we first heard from France that Roger was dead, why, that was one thing. If she wanted to come out here then, and moon over the furniture they'd bought for their own home, all right. All — well — and — good. But the man's been dead two years, poor fellow. And we do need a car.

ETHEL

We got along very well without one. . . .

THOMAS

When we couldn't afford it. But three years in the munitions business. . . . Won't you *ever* be able to realize! . . .

ETHEL

Yes, I do, of course, . . .

THOMAS (*walking about*)

She ought to get rid of this stuff; or if she won't, she ought to have it stored. This arrangement isn't good for the furniture; it isn't good for Cecily; . . . and it *will* be good for Fanny to take a long ride every day.

ETHEL

Yes, that's true. And Cecily loves Fanny. We always used to dream we'd have little girls the same age, and I suppose she remembers it now.

THOMAS (*abstracted, measuring things with his eye*)
Fifteen feet. . . .

ETHEL

Sometimes she offers me advice about Fanny in the most peculiar way. . . .

THOMAS (*pursuing his count*)

Thirty to forty . . . um . . . fifteen from that. . . .

ETHEL

As if she knew some other child.

THOMAS (*planning*)

We'll have the place cleaned out by the end of the week. . . .

ETHEL

I do dread talking to her. . . .

THOMAS (*rounding on her*)

Then *I* will.

ETHEL

No! Oh, no, Tom! You'd better let me.

THOMAS (*turning away again*)

All *right*.

ETHEL

When she comes back from her walk. . . .

THOMAS (*investigating*)

It'll be roomy enough, I think, without removing the stalls. . . . (*He goes into one, and we hear him exclaim*) Fanny!

[*He comes out with her.*]

FANNY (*giggling*)

Yes, papa, I hid!

ETHEL

Why, Fanny! How did you get in?

FANNY

Through the window.

ETHEL (*doubtfully*)

Into Auntie Cecily's barn. . . .

THOMAS

Our barn. I guess she can come, if she wants to.

FANNY

Oh, yes, mamma, please let me! It's just the loveliest playroom. . . .

THOMAS

Some use for it, after all.

ETHEL

Tom! . . .

FANNY

And there's another little girl says she lives here.

THOMAS

What! Where?

FANNY

She was in the stall with me. Didn't you see her?
[*Thomas strides over and looks in.*]

THOMAS (*decidedly*)

There's nobody there.

ETHEL

I guess she means her dolly.

FANNY

No, I *don't*, . . .

ETHEL (*uneasy*)

Yes, yes, Fanny, all right. . . . Come, Tom, I really think we'd better go. Haven't you seen everything you want to? Please come! . . .

THOMAS (*going*)

What's the hurry?

ETHEL

I must return the key!

[They reach the door.]

THOMAS (*grumbling*)

You'd think we'd stolen it.

ETHEL

Come, Fanny. . . .

FANNY

Oh, I want to stay.

ETHEL (*very nervous*)

But the key, dear. . . .

FANNY

I go through the window!

ETHEL

Five minutes, then.

[She goes out. Thomas starts to follow, then returns to the child.]

THOMAS

Now, look here, Fanny. Don't scar the furniture, it's valuable. But you come in to play, whenever you want to, . . . till we start the alterations. Then you'll have to keep out, remember. *That's* the sort of thing you can't go prying into.

FANNY

Yes, papa. And can I have the other little girl stay and play with me?

THOMAS

Who? . . . Oh. . . . (*He looks toward the stall; then pats Fanny on the shoulder, and says, to humor her*) Yes, yes. Where you get your imagination, I don't know.

[Having thus delivered himself, he goes out, shutting the door after him. The barn returns to its former dimness. Fanny goes curiously to the stall, and looks in.]

FANNY

He said you weren't there!

[Lisbeth, holding her doll, comes out.]

LISBETH

Who was he?

FANNY

My father. *(She adds, triumphant)* You see, he's a real live person.

LISBETH

Dolls are not real, but I like them, don't you?

FANNY

Yes. Yours is lovely.

LISBETH

My mother made her dress. And my daddy gave her to me. But yours is a nice doll, too.

FANNY

Let's play house with them. You bring your baby to call on me.

LISBETH

But this is my house.

FANNY

Oh, there, you said it again!

LISBETH *(anxious)*

Are you angry?

FANNY

N-no. You can have it your way, *this time*. Only, remember that *next*. . . . *(She recalls the parents' talk)* Oh, my! There won't *be* any next time. I guess there'll be so much automobile in here, *we'll*

have to keep out. But I can ride in the automobile.
And maybe I'll ask you.

LISBETH

That would be very nice.

FANNY (*pursuing her new idea*)

I know what let's play. You be Auntie Cecily, and
I'll be my mother coming to tell you about our new car.

LISBETH

I don't think I know how to play that.

FANNY

Oh, it's easy! You just sit and say "All right" to
everything I ask you.

LISBETH (*sitting down*)

All right.

FANNY (*imitating her mother*)

You know, Cecily, Roger doesn't really love you.

LISBETH

All right.

FANNY (*still imitating*)

And Fanny's a good girl; she needs to go out riding
every day.

LISBETH

All right.

FANNY (*half forgetting the game*)

Well, how can she, if you won't put all your furniture
into a real tomb?

LISBETH

What's a tomb?

FANNY (*lapsing entirely into her own voice*)

I don't know, they have them over in France. (*Then,
going on with her part*) Will you let us have the
automobile?

LISBETH

All right.

FANNY

That's good, now I must go tell Tom. (*She paces to the door and tries it. From now on, she talks in her natural tones*) Oh, they locked the door. (*She comes back and climbs on the sideboard*) I'll play the window was a door. (*She puts her head out, and then hastily pops it back in again*) Lisbeth! We've got to run. Auntie Cecily's just coming out of the house. And she'll be very cross. (*She reconnoitres cautiously*) You hide in the stall again! Go on! (*Lisbeth obeys, but she is not frightened*) And when she unlocks the door, I'll drop down from here! . . .

LISBETH (*calling from the stall*)

Good-by, Fanny!

FANNY (*calling back softly*)

Good-by, Lisbeth!

[*We hear the key in the lock. Fanny disappears, closing the window behind her. The big door moves slowly open. Cecily, all in white, stands on the threshold. The driveway is no longer bathed in sun-glow, but the sky is beginning to take on the pink tints of the sunset. Cecily closes the door and looks about, seeming surprised to find no one there.*

CECILY (*calling*)

Lisbeth!

[*Lisbeth's head appears round the corner of the stall.*

LISBETH

Is it you, mother?

[*She runs out to her.*

CECILY (*kneeling to hug her*)

Yes, darling. (*They come front together. This whole scene is played in half-tones*) Where were you hiding?

LISBETH

In the stall.

CECILY (*as if catching herself*)

In the room!

LISBETH

Yes.

CECILY (*sitting down in the rocker*)

The sun has almost set, Lisbeth, and the sky is pink.

LISBETH (*snuggling into her arms*)

Daddy will come.

CECILY

Home. To you and me. It's very near the hour we have together.

LISBETH

All three of us!

CECILY

And we love each other more than any one else in the world.

LISBETH

If you loved me very much, you would tell me a story.

CECILY

Now?

LISBETH

Oh, yes, mother.

CECILY

Story-time is after supper.

LISBETH

Well, then, are you going to cook supper now?

CECILY (*laughing gaily, but very low*)

I think I will. Daddy likes beefsteak, we'll have that to-night.

LISBETH (*delighted*)

What do you think he will say, when he opens the door and sniffs it?

CECILY

"Fee — fi — fo — fum!"

LISBETH

Won't he kiss us first?

CECILY (*judicious*)

Well, sometimes you forget to do that, when you've been married a long time.

LISBETH

How long?

CECILY

Oh, — very long. (*Smiling, she goes back into the past*) When we first set up housekeeping here — (*Her voice sobers and changes*) — two years ago — (*And then again the tender playfulness*) — you began by being a baby in a long lace dress. I used to rock you. But you couldn't talk, and I didn't like that. Besides, I saw your Cousin Fanny all the rest of the time; and she did some cunning things, and I wanted you to do them, too. And other things she did weren't cunning at all, and I knew you could do them so much better. And then, I was always afraid she might come out here some day and find you; and, being so much bigger than you, drop you or tease you or make you cry. I couldn't have that! So you grew up very quickly to your Cousin Fanny's age; and when she had her sixth birthday, you had yours.

LISBETH

The cake was good.

CECILY

Daddy liked it!

LISBETH

Will he be hungry now?

CECILY

Yes. His little girl had better set the table.

LISBETH (*slipping down from her lap*)

He always comes, before I finish it! (*She runs into the second of the two stalls*)

CECILY (*looking after her*)

Then hurry!

LISBETH (*from the stall*)

What will you be doing, mother?

CECILY

Mending.

[*She opens a table drawer, takes out a work-basket, and begins to darn socks. There comes a crash from the stall. Lisbeth walks slowly out to her, guilty and repentant.*]

LISBETH (*stopping by her elbow*)

I broke a dish.

CECILY (*severely reproachful*)

Oh, you naughty girl. (*She hugs her suddenly tight*)
Be more careful with mother's dishes. They're French china, sent by daddy's relatives, for a — wedding present. . . .

LISBETH (*returning*)

I'll carry every one with both my hands.

CECILY (*mending again*)

That's the way!

LISBETH (*out of sight*)

Will daddy scold?

CECILY

Oh, no. He's too gentle. . . .

LISBETH

Is he coming now?

CECILY (*taking a listening attitude*)

I don't yet hear his big cane tapping up the walk. . . .

LISBETH

It's time. . .

CECILY

Almost.

LISBETH

Tell me. . . .

CECILY (*as if commencing a ritual*)

First he gets off a big electric car, . . .

[The door opens, and Ethel stands in the entrance. The sky is red behind her. Cecily starts, trembles, and looks round; then she slips the basket into the drawer, and gets to her feet.]

ETHEL

Cecily. . . . (*She advances, apologetic*) I'm sorry to come in.

CECILY

That's — no matter.

ETHEL (*nervous*)

. . . But Fanny told me you were here.

CECILY

How did she know?

ETHEL

She — she must have seen you.

CECILY (*looking at her*)

What's the trouble, Ethel?

ETHEL (*in a tone of deep sympathy*)

My dear, — do you think this is right?

CECILY

What?

ETHEL

You — to come here every day — like this. Don't you suppose — it ever worries us?

CECILY

Us?

ETHEL

Why — Tom . . . and me.

CECILY (*inscrutable*)

That's kind of Tom.

ETHEL

And Roger wouldn't want you to.

CECILY

Don't.

ETHEL

Two whole years . . . it's making you morbid . . . it's not healthy for you. . . . (*Cecily is silent*) And, my dear! . . . Have you ever thought how bad it is for the furniture?

CECILY (*slowly*)

Tom *would* know good furniture when he saw it.

ETHEL (*nonplussed and getting confused*)

I don't see what that's got to do with it. It's the Will of Heaven — what I'm talking about. . . .

CECILY

Not the will of Tom.

ETHEL

You act as if Tom wanted to use your furniture. Don't be unjust, Cecily. He's got plenty of his own. He merely thinks you ought to *store* it — in a responsible place.

CECILY

And then . . . what does he plan to do with the barn?

[Ethel is struck dumb for a full moment. Then she hedges.]

ETHEL

It's for Fanny's good, mostly, although we'd all of us like . . . use it.

CECILY (*deadly quiet*)

What's for Fanny's good?

ETHEL (*forced to confession*)

A car.

CECILY

Oh, yes.

ETHEL (*laughing nervously*)

It's a wonder he didn't think of it before.

CECILY

Isn't it?

ETHEL (*rapidly*)

Of course, I know that father left the property to us both, and that it's as much yours as ours. And where we've always had our way about the management of the house, it did seem as if you might keep the say-so regarding the barn. But Tom is possessed to have a car, and it *would* be silly to pay for garage room, when we have this whole big stable being put to no use at all. (*She laughs uneasily*) I believe

Fanny *does* use it for a playroom sometimes, but of course *that* doesn't count. . . .

CECILY

Playroom! . . .

ETHEL (*apologetic*)

She didn't want you to know.

CECILY (*making an appeal*)

Ethel, I — I use it . . . sometimes — too — for a playroom. I come here — and live. . . .

ETHEL (*breaking in soothingly*)

Live it all over again. There, what did I tell you, dear? It's doing you lots of harm. . . .

CECILY (*standing away from her*)

You talk of your child's good. . . . Do you know, if I gave up this place of mine, I'd. . . . I'd altogether lose. . . .

ETHEL (*with unintended cruelty*)

What have you got to lose?

CECILY (*giving it up, with a passion of hopelessness*)

Oh, I won't! . . . I won't!

ETHEL (*nervous*)

Cecily, don't say that. Don't make me take that answer back to Tom. You know how he can be. . . .

[*Cecily calms down and stares at her.*]

CECILY (*at last*)

Yes! I know.

ETHEL

No peace for any of us.

CECILY (*repeating dully*)

I know.

ETHEL (*following up her advantage*)

Moving the things will be an awful wrench, but

you'll feel better when it's done at last. (*No answer*)
It had to happen some day. (*No answer*) Oh, I am
sorry for you, dear! . . . (*No answer*) Will you let
me say to Tom that you agree?

CECILY (*after a very long pause, speaking in a voice half-strangled*)

All right.

ETHEL (*meekly hiding her triumph*)

Thank you. (*She goes hastily to the door. There she turns to say*) You won't be sorry. . . .

[*She disappears, closing the door. Cecily looks round her, dazed. She begins to go about, touching one thing and then another. Lisbeth comes out to her.*]

LISBETH

The table is all set, but daddy hasn't come.

CECILY (*turning and looking at her with yearning*)

Oh, Lisbeth!

LISBETH (*anxious*)

Isn't he coming? Not ever?

CECILY (*glancing after Ethel*)

Something made him late.

LISBETH (*clinging to Cecily*)

Won't he come to-night?

CECILY (*choking back the tears*)

Yes, — he'll come . . . to-night. (*Her voice breaks. She sits down in the rocker, and Lisbeth climbs on her lap*) But not to-morrow, Lisbeth. Nor the next night, nor the next, nor ever, ages long. Oh, what shall I do?

LISBETH

Daddy won't be here?

CECILY

No.

LISBETH

Oh, I — I'll cry for him!

CECILY

Listen, darling. You won't have to cry. For you're going where daddy is, Lisbeth. Mother's going to send you — to him.

LISBETH

Send me away?

CECILY

Yes. I'll put on your white coat, and your little white hat to match. And your doll will go, too, and your wee straw suitcase, and everything that is yours.

LISBETH

I don't want to.

CECILY

Oh — it will be nice there. Some place very beautiful, far off . . . and throbbing with love . . . and still. Daddy'll be there to meet you; and you and he will go hand in hand, down to Eternity.

LISBETH

I wish you were coming, too.

CECILY

So do I. But I've only this one night, with the two of you.

LISBETH

Then daddy had better hurry, hadn't he?

CECILY

Yes; that's so! Or they'll be calling me.

LISBETH

Let's listen for him.

[They sit with heads uplifted, expectant. Then Cecily recommences the ritual, but in a far different tone.]

CECILY

First he gets off a big electric car. . . .

LISBETH (*happily*)

The gong rings for him. . . .

CECILY

And he crosses the street. . . .

LISBETH

Looking both ways for automobiles. . . .

CECILY

Auto . . . ! (*She sobs outright*) Oh, Lisbeth, Lisbeth! . . .

LISBETH

You've got to go on, mother. Or he won't come.

CECILY (*with a great effort*)

He — he reaches his house, and feels. . . .

LISBETH

In his pocket for his key. . . .

CECILY

And then we hear. . . . (*The tears come again*) And then. . . . (*She checks them at last*) And then we hear his big cane tapping up the walk.*[Just about now, a tapping sound outside becomes plainly audible.]*

LISBETH

If we listen, we . . . (*She breaks off the ritual and looks into Cecily's face, puzzled*) What makes it so loud, mother?*[The tapping comes nearer.]*

CECILY

Oh! It sounds so *real*, because we're feeling badly.

LISBETH

It's the last time, and it's different.

CECILY (*murmuring*)

It goes pounding into my heart. . . .

LISBETH

Let's keep on.

CECILY

When he arrives at the door. . . .

[*Lisbeth jumps down, and starts toward it.*

LISBETH

He turns the key in the lock. . . .

CECILY

And opens it. . . .

[*The barn door goes creaking again into its groove. Cecily comes to her feet with a cry. Against the violet light of the dying sunset, a figure darkens the doorway. It is a man on crutches, in an officer's worn uniform of faded horizon blue.*

ROGER (*trying to keep steady a voice trembling with emotion*)

Cecily. . . .

[*By this time, there is no trace of Lisbeth. She may well have vanished behind some furniture stacked in the shadows by the door. Cecily stares at him, dazed. Then one of her hands goes groping out for the child. Her voice comes half in a whisper.*

CECILY

Lisbeth — daddy never — never wore clothes like that. . . .

ROGER

Cecily . . . don't be frightened. — Don't be frightened! . . .

[He comes down to her slowly, his crutches tapping over the rough floor. She takes a step toward him; and her hand, still groping for Lisbeth, touches the reality of his coat.]

CECILY *(looking piteously up at him)*

It's not — not make-believe. . . .

ROGER *(trying to laugh)*

No, dear. Not make-believe. But really me!

CECILY *(still in the dazed whisper)*

You. . . . *(Then, in a great cry)* Roger! *(She clings to him, sobbing)* Roger! . . . Oh, Roger! . . . Roger! . . .

ROGER

Oh — Ethel should have come and told you first. . . . I met her out there . . . she . . .

CECILY *(lifting her head)*

No, you! . . . You only! . . . *(Their lips meet in a long kiss)* Roger, I . . . how did . . . when did you . . . ?

ROGER

Ethel said you never heard. . . .

CECILY

Only — death. And then the years. . . .

ROGER

Poor love! . . .

CECILY

And they wanted to take away our things. . . .

ROGER *(looking about)*

The — old — house . . . that was to be! . . .

CECILY

All I had . . . a playhouse. . . .

[She sways.]

ROGER

Let's go out of here. We don't need dumb things any more — and dreams.

CECILY (*as they go upstage*)

Oh, Roger — I never heard . . . I never heard. . . .

[They come to the door. Beyond them is the deepening blue of early twilight.]

ROGER (*as they pass out*)

Why, it was coming from Germany straight through Holland . . . and not daring to stop, even for sending word, that made me. . . .

[The two of them disappear, his voice dying away. When the coast is clear, Fanny opens the window and drops through.]

FANNY (*from the sideboard, in a hoarse, excited whisper*)

Lisbeth! (*She waits for an answer. None comes. She jumps down to the floor*) Lisbeth! They've gone. I want you to come out and tell me every single word they said! (*Still no reply. She begins searching through the stalls and shadowy corners, under the furniture, everywhere. The last place she tries is under the rocker, center stage. Lisbeth is not there. She gets up slowly, in absolute bewilderment*) Why . . . !

CURTAIN

FAMINE AND THE GHOST

A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

First produced in Boston, Mass., by the Theatre
Guild of Boston, on April 30, 1920.

CHARACTERS

THE ARTIST

BASIL

THE THING

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BY DORIS F. HALMAN.

FAMINE AND THE GHOST

SCENE: *A room in a little old house falling to decay. Through two cobwebby windows at the back one sees a green night sky pregnant with impending storm, against which huge and squatty leafless trees toss their twisted branches. Between these windows is a battered couch upholstered with black haircloth. The entrance to the room is in the left wall. Opposite it, a sooty fireplace juts out into the room, in such a manner as to turn slightly up-stage its front of stained and yellow tiles. A chair green with age and decay, and hideous of form, stands near it; and over by the door, a smaller chair and a three-legged table lean away from each other at drunken angles. When the curtain goes up, there is no light, save the green horror from the windows. The wind howls.*

After curtain-rise, there is a moment of the wind's steady howling. The trees from outside leer in through the windows at the audience. Then the door is kicked open, revealing more trees and sky, and letting a great gust of the storm-gale whine through the room. A man stumbles in, carrying a little boy in his arms.

THE ARTIST

Come, little son, don't tremble so.

BASIL

But the trees, daddy! They almost caught us, as we came by.

THE ARTIST

Nonsense! . . .

BASIL

And this house! It leaned so crooked into the green storm. . . .

THE ARTIST

Brave, Basil! Let me set you down out of my arms, so I can get the candle from my pack.

BASIL

And then will you shut the door, daddy?

THE ARTIST

When we have more light.

[He sets Basil on his feet.]

BASIL

Are you taking the candle out now, daddy?

THE ARTIST

Yes, and the matches.

BASIL

It must be hard to find them in the dark.

THE ARTIST (*with a little bitter laugh*)

No. There is nothing else in my pack but my paint-box and some bread.

BASIL

I think the trees will be afraid of the candle.

THE ARTIST (*trying to joke*)

Yes. They will stay outside with the storm.

[His match sputters into flame. Then the candle-glow shows them the old room streaked with shadows. The artist closes the door. We see them more plainly: a boy of seven, in a worn little suit, and a tall thin man in shabby clothes, who is hollow-cheeked and pale, with eyes feverishly bright.]

BASIL (*looking about fearfully*)

Is this the haunted house, daddy?

THE ARTIST

It's where the farm folk on the hill told us to come for shelter.

BASIL

They said there was a ghost.

[The artist leans toward him, supporting himself by the table. His breath comes hard enough to be heard in the pauses. The forced gaiety of his tone makes a strange contrast with his weakness.]

THE ARTIST

Yes. Old Miser Crimmins — that was his name, wasn't it? Well, I never heard of an old Miser Crimmins, did you?

BASIL (*doubtful*)

N-no.

THE ARTIST

Then I don't believe there was ever any such person.

BASIL

But the farm folk on the hill. . . .

THE ARTIST (*muttering*)

I could have sworn you were sleeping, when I called to them, at their window.

BASIL

I woke up, daddy. I heard what they said quite clearly, when they leaned down out of their room. They weren't very polite.

THE ARTIST (*muttering*)

God knows that.

BASIL

Why didn't they open their door to us? . . . or their

barn, like you asked them, daddy, where the hay is warm?

THE ARTIST

They thought we were tramps.

BASIL

But you told them you were an artist without any money, and I was a little boy.

THE ARTIST (*bitterly*)

Yes, and about my sickness, and the doctor, and how death waited for me in the cities, and how I'd do what I could when morning came, to earn our keep. What difference did they make, all those things that are true?

BASIL

We couldn't stay in the city.

THE ARTIST

But famine is in the country. Waiting — waiting, just the same way.

BASIL

What is famine?

THE ARTIST (*evasive*)

A thing.

BASIL

I heard what the farm folk said. "Down in the hollow," they called to us, "in a circle of dead trees." How can trees be dead, when they wave their arms so wildly?

THE ARTIST

It means they have no leaves.

BASIL

Then the farmer called to us, "Old Miser Crimmins' ghost will let you in. It will serve him right to be

hospit-able, like he never was alive." What did he mean by that, daddy?

THE ARTIST

Only to frighten us away.

BASIL

And we heard their laughter coming down from the warm, lighted bedroom.

THE ARTIST

Because they didn't know that an artist's child has a soul that makes pictures.

BASIL

My soul is making a picture of old Miser Crimmins' ghost now, daddy. I shall know him when I see him. It will be very terrible. (*The wind sweeps round the house, in a furious gust*) Listen! Do you s'pose the wind just met him coming round the corner?

THE ARTIST

No, no. Forget the night outside, Basil. Remember that we have come inside a house, where it is light and warmer.

BASIL (*gazing about him*)

There is only one thing in this room that isn't very dark. That's the little tiles, on the fireplace.

THE ARTIST

Yes. They are yellow with soot now, but once they were white, and smooth.

BASIL

This is an ugly house. I think. . . .

THE ARTIST

What do you think, little son?

BASIL (*softly*)

Old Miser Crimmins — wouldn't *want* to come back.

THE ARTIST

He couldn't, if he did. The door is closed.

BASIL

You've put the wind out, too. And all the trees will wave their crooked arms and tear it. That's why it howls so.

THE ARTIST (*coming to him*)

We two — we fancy things.

BASIL

And it can't go whining through the room any more. . . . Why did it do that, daddy? Was it looking for something?

THE ARTIST

The miser's hidden treasure, maybe.

[*He laughs low and bitterly; and, staggering across the room, falls spent into the green chair.*]

BASIL

I think you are tired.

[*He runs over to him.*]

THE ARTIST

No.

BASIL

I don't see how you can help it. You walked in the long white road all day. I only walked a little while, before you carried me. And my feet ached a very great deal. (*The man winces. The wind, at that moment, swirls moaning past*) The wind sounds tired, too. It never could find the treasure.

THE ARTIST (*having forgotten*)

What? . . . Oh, here.

BASIL

Couldn't we find it?

THE ARTIST (*falling to muttering again*)

We. With treasure. Treasure to ride from place to place. Treasure to buy clothes. (*Then, in a new tone*) And food. Savoury things, with many little perfumes bringing life.

[*He bows his head on his hands. After a pause, Basil suggests to him.*]

BASIL

Can we have supper now, daddy? (*A second pause*)
You said there was bread.

[*The artist rouses.*]

THE ARTIST

Yes. We'll have supper. (*He crosses to his pack, which he has left on the table. From it he takes his paint-box, and then a portion of bread wrapped in paper*) And then you must get some rest.

BASIL (*as his father unwraps the bread*)

If there is another room, daddy, with a bed in it, I had much rather not go. It's pleasanter staying here, with you and the candle.

THE ARTIST (*absently*)

Well, the couch will do.

[*He is looking at the bit of bread. It is pitifully small, and he gives it all to Basil.*]

BASIL (*eating*)

And where will you sleep, daddy?

THE ARTIST

Oh, I'm not drowsy.

[*He turns away from the child, so as not to see him eat.*]

BASIL

And why don't you take *your* supper, daddy?

THE ARTIST

Oh, I'm not hungry. (*Basil puts down his bread and looks at him. He adds, hastily*) I'm saving mine for later, when you've gone to sleep.

BASIL

You hardly ever eat when I do.

THE ARTIST

What nonsense! You forget.

BASIL (*finishing the bread*)

I expect the trees don't eat anything. That's why they're thin, and look at things so twisted. (*The artist passes the back of his hand across his eyes*) I'm quite finished, daddy.

[*His father picks him up and carries him unsteadily to the couch. There he lays him down, with his head toward the door.*]

THE ARTIST

Are you warm enough?

BASIL

Well, — some of the wind stayed in.

[*The artist goes to one of the windows, runs his finger along the cracks in its frame, then takes off his coat and spreads it over the child.*]

THE ARTIST

Can you sleep now?

BASIL

Yes, I'm warm now.

THE ARTIST (*turning away*)

Good night, little son.

BASIL (*calling him back*)

Daddy? . . .

THE ARTIST

Yes?

BASIL

You'll — be right here?

THE ARTIST (*gently*)

All night long. (*Silence falls on the room. After a moment, he turns away from the couch. Without the dialogue, the wind seems louder, and rain begins to fall outside. Coming to the table, the artist picks up the paper that wrapped the bread, pours whatever crumbs are left into the palm of his hand and eats them, and then throws the paper from him with sudden violence. The effort makes him reel, almost fall. He staggers to the green chair, and sits staring vaguely into the empty grate. Then he puts out shaking hands to it, as if to warm them*) Famine! . . . Oh, God! (*He laughs suddenly and low, almost a cackle that escapes him in spite of himself. Frightened by the sound, he goes hastily back to the couch, but Basil is asleep. The storm, beating against the windows, sends him shuddering back to the chair. The wind begins to rattle the old door*) Who's that? . . . (*The door blows open, letting in the wind, and the candle goes out. We hear the artist's steps dragging across the room, and his voice muttering feverishly*) Can't be dark . . . got to watch. . . . (*Then the noise of the door kicked to.*) [*He manages to light the candle.*

It does not burn as brightly as before; and, in the green chair over by the fireplace sits now a stranger, a pallid woman, long and thin and hideous. Her hair hangs straight and shiny and green. Her skin is mottled green and yellow, very pale. Her two ears are white,

and her shriveled lips are strangely red. Her long rags hang about her, the color of ancient stains. Her voice, when she speaks, is parched and dry, like the rattle of old bones.

Now, these two talk in tones unnaturally hushed, with a quality of only imagined speech.

THE ARTIST (*discovering*)

Who are you?

THE THING (*in her terrible voice*)

You know who I am.

THE ARTIST (*his mind fighting against her*)

I never saw you before! . . .

THE THING

But you knew I was coming.

THE ARTIST (*shuddering*)

Famine!

[*Suddenly she grins at him with her red mouth.*]

THE THING

And waiting — and waiting.

THE ARTIST

I felt you near.

THE THING

We left the cities together. We walked together in the dusty road, very close. We had a tryst together, you and I.

THE ARTIST

And to-night, you stare me in the face! . . .

THE THING

You earned my kisses, when you did not eat.

THE ARTIST

Famine! . . .

THE THING

I have been waiting all summer for you and your little boy. (*She glides silently from chair to couch*)
Your pretty little boy. . . .

THE ARTIST (*following her*)

Keep away from him, you! He has eaten to-night!
[*She crawls back to her chair.*]

THE THING

There shall come a day when he will not eat; and then I shall kiss him, too.

THE ARTIST (*hoarse*)

Not while I am with him.

THE THING

But you are coming away with me, and he will be alone.

THE ARTIST

With you! No. . . .

THE THING (*after a little pause*)

The farm folk on the hill are friends of mine. They will not let me in, but they are friends. They send me company.

THE ARTIST

Why did you follow me to this house?

THE THING

It is my house. (*He falls back from her*) And the rootless trees are mine. And the cold hearth. Old Miser Crimmins left them to me, when he died.

THE ARTIST

Did you kill him, too?

THE THING

Not quite. We knew each other. He always kept

me near to him. . . . The kisses of a miser are sweet on my red lips; for they come from his desire.

THE ARTIST

Then why will you haunt the other men, that cannot help themselves?

THE THING (*pursuing her thought*)

And I knew his great secret. (*She grins at him again in her sudden, terrible way*) But I will not tell it to you.

THE ARTIST

I haven't asked you to tell me secrets! I haven't asked for your companionship! We will go away, out of this cursed house that is yours. . . .

THE THING

Then there will be three of us walking, our feet deep in the mud.

THE ARTIST

You — would — follow?

THE THING

I would go *beside*.

THE ARTIST

No!

THE THING

Why not? I will even carry your little boy, close in my arms. And I will sing him a lullaby, of ravens that are starving.

THE ARTIST (*shuddering*)

God! . . .

THE THING

Where you are, I will be.

THE ARTIST (*more agitated*)

Listen, Thing! We will drive a bargain, you and I! . . .

THE THING (*warning him*)

I trade in human souls.

THE ARTIST.

So be it. Mine! I will serve you through eternity, for one solemn vow. Promise me, Thing, you will never set your skinny hands on the little white form of my boy!

THE THING (*laughing*)

Oh, my beloved, you are mine already!

THE ARTIST (*desperate*)

But. . . .

THE THING

I have no need of promises.

THE ARTIST

You will not make it?

THE THING

Of course not.

THE ARTIST

You will not go away, nor let us go?

THE THING

I can wait — patiently.

THE ARTIST

Oh! it's unbearable! . . .

THE THING (*with amusement*)

Why?

THE ARTIST

Because you are hideous. Greener than the storm, more wasted than all decay. My eyes cannot quit the sight of you, and my shuddering thoughts find no peace. (*His frenzy increases*) I wish — I wish I had a looking-glass to hold up before you! Then — you would frighten yourself away! (*She laughs*)

You don't believe it! But you would! There would be snakes in the glass, do you hear! — your hair; and your curved bones, almost showing through! And the filth of your clothes, and your gaping lips, and the red rims of your eyes! (*Pacing the room, he comes to the table; and, with a hoarse cry, seizes upon the paint-box*) Look, Thing!

THE THING

There is no food in your box; so I am not afraid.

THE ARTIST

But you shall have an image of yourself . . . on paper! . . . (*He stares round the room*) No paper. . . . And I've been out of it for days. . . . (*He lunges toward her fiercely*) You knew that! Or you wouldn't have dared. . . . (*Tottering as he passes behind her, he catches at the fireplace for support. Then, slowly, he recoils, staring at the tiles*) The tiles! They are yellow with soot now; but once they were white, and smooth. . . . (*He falls upon them, scraping the soot away*) I will make you a frightful image on the tiles!

THE THING

Then there will be a monument to Famine, as there never has been before.

THE ARTIST (*working at the soot*)

You shall see!

THE THING

To be envied by the other children of Death.

[*Having cleared a space on the tiles, the artist begins to paint.*]

THE ARTIST (*laughing madly*)

You didn't know I was an artist, did you?

THE THING

Yes. I knew. Artists belong to me. From time immemorial, I have done to them . . . what I shall do to you.

THE ARTIST

No! For you are going to be scared away. (*She laughs again*) You sit there now, and let me copy you. But you will be sorry for it, when the head of you grins on the little tiles.

THE THING

What are you painting now?

THE ARTIST

Your staring eyes. And the way your hair hangs down like pieces of wet string.

THE THING

Glorify the image of Famine the eternal: the rival of high Fame for the kisses of all great men. They woo *her* because she glitters and is beautiful; but in the end most of them mate with me. And she goes boasting through the world of the conquest of those worth while. But the greatest of all men have been rocked to sleep in my arms; and afterwards I have thrown to her their memories and the dry dust of their bones.

THE ARTIST

Your pallid ears. . . .

THE THING

They are all white, like urns, and into them go the ghost-like thoughts of starving men.

THE ARTIST

Your lips. . . .

THE THING

They will be redder still, when I have kissed you.

THE ARTIST

Horror — your horror — grows apace on the tiles. (*He puts on a last touch*) I have put spots on them worse than the soot of dead fires! . . . (*Suddenly triumphant, he flings his paint-box down on the mantel, and points from her to his work*) Look, Thing! And know what fear is! (*He glances at it himself, and, shuddering, whispers*) Look! If you dare. . . . (*The Thing looks at her image, and grins her wide red grin. He cries to her, his voice shaking*) Why don't you go? . . . (*A great sob escapes him. He stares with growing terror from the head beside him to the one he has made. Then, whispering*) And now there are two — two of you staring! . . . (*He almost screams in his frenzy*) God! . . . (*And rushes from the room*) [*As swiftly as he goes, the Thing, gliding silently, is at his side. He sinks down on the step, buries his head in his arms, and sobs like a child. The Thing bends over him. Then the wind slams the door loudly to, and we see them no longer. Only, very faintly, from time to time, we can hear the artist sobbing.*

The noise of the door wakes Basil. He opens his eyes, stirs, and says sleepily:

BASIL

Daddy. . . . (*A little louder, he repeats*) Daddy, what was that? (*Getting no answer, he sits up. His eyes fall directly on the tiles. For a horrified moment, he stares at them, his breath coming fast. Then, pointing, he half cries, half moans*) Oh! . . . (*And buries his face in his hands. His muffled little voice comes out*

from behind them) Oh, ghost, go away! (*He peers cautiously out; but the painted image is still there. Then he tries politeness*) Please, Mister Crimmins, go away! (*No result. He calls*) Daddy! . . . (*Then he looks about the room, and sees himself alone. He musters up all his courage, gets off the couch, and, keeping a safe distance, begins to argue with the image*) I suppose you — you don't like it, because we came to your house. But the storm's real bad, and we were so very tired. (*This apology failing, he grows more hopeless and scared*) I don't see why — you — you smile that way. You needn't think I don't know who you are, because the farm folk told us. (*He backs away, coming nearer the door*) Oh, you are terrible! . . . (*Then he hears his father sobbing outside. Turning toward the door, almost unable to believe his ears, he listens. He murmurs*) Daddy. . . . (*Then all his little body stiffens with fury. He turns on the tiles*) You — made — my — father — cry! (*He seizes the small chair and brandishes it*) You frightened him! (*He starts across the room*) I'll teach you to hurt my father! (*Half sobbing with rage and fright, he flings himself on the painted horror, and batters away at it with all his strength. For a moment, only the blows of his chair sound through the room.*

Then the tiles come loose and fall breaking at his feet. Small things, ringing metallic, tumble out after them. The candle-light flickers on their yellow gleam. Pausing, chair uplifted, Basil looks at them. Then, in a long-drawn breath of wonder

Oh-h-h-h . . . ! . . . (*He throws down the chair, and puts both hands into the opening, pushing heap*

after heap of round gold coins to the floor. Then he sets up a loud and joyful crying) Daddy! . . . Daddy! . . . Daddy!

[The door opens; and his father, very haggard, looks in. But the Thing has disappeared. And at that moment, the wind goes rushing away, moaning, with a sound almost like the rattle of dry bones. Not that the storm dies down — it continues up to the end of the play.]

THE ARTIST (*low*)

I didn't mean to leave you — Basil. . . .

BASIL (*interrupting*)

Daddy — look! (*The artist comes nearer, and sees the broken tiles, and the floor spread with the glittering heaps. With a cry, he stoops, filling his hands*) I drove the ghost away. It won't ever come back.

THE ARTIST

Treasure! Treasure to ride from place to place! Treasure to buy clothes! (*His voice breaks*) And food. . . . (*He gathers the child close into his arms*) Oh, little son! . . . Thank God! . . .

[Basil hugs him rapturously. The storm rages outside, but neither of them pays the slightest heed to it.]

CURTAIN

THE DIFFICULT BORDER

A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

THE FATHER
THE MOTHER
THE AUNT
ROSAMOND
THE PRINCE

Copyright, 1922,
BY DORIS F. HALMAN.

THE DIFFICULT BORDER

SCENE: *The edge of a strange wood, where dark fir trees lean to caress slim white birches, and golden sunlight filters through to dance on tangles of vines in brilliant flower.*

We know it is the edge, because in the center of the stage the trees fall away and leave our view clear to travel over gently rising meadows to where a moated castle in ruins crowns the summit of a hill. Looking at this, beside ourselves, in the stillness, is a group of American sightseers — a man and his wife and an aunt and a little girl. Every one but the little girl has a guide book, and is peering from it to the castle with a vast deal of bewilderment. The little girl, whom they wanted to leave at home but couldn't very well, is gazing straight at the castle. She has a large book under her arm, with the kind of gay cover that printers give to childhood.

The time is after the War.

THE FATHER

It is not in Baedeker.

THE MOTHER

It is not in the "Guide to the Battlefields of Ruined France and Belgium."

THE AUNT

It is not in this French Geography.

THE FATHER

Then it must be in Belgium.

THE AUNT (*stiffly*)

I am reading the Belgian section of the French Geography.

THE FATHER

Then it must be in France.

THE AUNT

I have read about France already. And I think I have taught school long enough to know how to locate things.

THE MOTHER

Yes, don't you remember, Charley, we located every place straight up to the border.

THE FATHER

We didn't locate the border.

THE MOTHER

Why, then, I suppose this is the border.

THE AUNT

It isn't. I feel it in my bones.

THE FATHER

We started all right for the border. Baedeker says, "Now you come to a wood. . . ."

THE MOTHER

The Guide says, "Where one heroic nation mingles its soil with the other, a forest rises. . . ."

THE AUNT

The Geography says, "The fauna and flora of that forest are . . ." (*she gapes about*) . . . nothing like the queer things in this.

THE FATHER (*reading*)

"Midway in wood. Signpost at the fork of three roads. Turn left. . . ." (*He gapes about*) No signpost. No roads.

THE MOTHER (*reading*)

"A skeleton forest, of torn and leafless trees. . . ."

(*She gapes about*) But this looks like a *healthy* forest,

Charley.

THE AUNT

And we absolutely none of us have mention of that castle.

THE CHILD

It looks familiar to me.

THE MOTHER

What? To you, Rosamond?

ROSAMOND (*nodding*)

I've seen a picture of it somewhere.

THE MOTHER (*falling upon her*)

You have? Where, darling? Was it in one of our books? Which one?

ROSAMOND

It wasn't. You never let me look at them, for fear I might tear the page and lose us.

THE MOTHER (*hopefully*)

But you peeked when we didn't know it, — didn't you, darling?

ROSAMOND

No, I didn't.

THE MOTHER

But then where. . . .

ROSAMOND

It must have been in one of my own books, either at home or this one.

[*She begins to open her book, too.*]

THE FATHER (*sharply*)

Don't be silly.

[*Rosamond closes the book.*]

THE MOTHER (*apologizing to the aunt for her*)

Her new fairy tales! . . .

THE FATHER

Rosamond, it's not polite to read in company.

[*The three grown-ups become absorbed in their books again.*]

ROSAMOND

I've seen a picture of that castle *somewhere*.

THE FATHER (*looking up*)

Oh, nonsense.

THE AUNT

That's what we get for having a child along.

ROSAMOND (*interested*)

What have you got, Aunt Susan?

THE AUNT (*glaring at her*)

We never should have left our car to come into these woods. It was only because Rosamond wanted to pick flowers. Now we're probably lost, and can't get back to the road, and then we'll have to go to that perfectly strange castle. . . .

ROSAMOND

It looks familiar to me.

[*The truth begins to wear upon their nerves.*]

THE MOTHER (*very reproving*)

Rosamond!

ROSAMOND

I have seen a picture. . . .

THE FATHER (*very strict*)

Rosamond!

ROSAMOND (*patiently*)

Well, I'll try to forget that I've seen a picture of that familiar-looking castle somewhere.

THE FATHER

Rosamond, I am going to spank you, if you say that again.

THE AUNT

Good for you, Charles. I wish you would.

ROSAMOND

But, father, I said I would *forget* that I had seen. . . .

THE FATHER (*sitting down on a log*)

Come here, Rosamond.

THE MOTHER

Go to your father.

[*Rosamond, forced to obey, is placed immediately in the traditional position. It is while she hangs thus, head downward, that she sees something in the vines.*]

ROSAMOND (*enabled to change the subject*)

Oh! I see something!

THE MOTHER (*with reasonable doubt*)

Is it important?

ROSAMOND

It's tin with a feather on it.

THE FATHER (*letting her down and rising*)

What!

[*He picks from the tangle a silver helmet, visored in ancient fashion, from whose crest waves a long white plume sadly out of curl. Under the plume is twisted a tiny embroidered glove.*]

THE THREE GROWN-UPS (*in one voice*)

It's a helmet.

[*Rosamond, who would have known it before the war, is silent.*]

THE FATHER

It's not an American helmet.

THE MOTHER

It's not a French or a British helmet.

THE AUNT

It's not a German helmet.

THE FATHER

The Italians had feathers in some of theirs.

THE MOTHER

But they were roosters' feathers, weren't they, Charley?

THE AUNT

It looks to me like an Ancient Roman helmet. "All Gaul is divided into three parts." It won't help us to locate ourselves.

THE FATHER

Nonsense. It's been left here recently. Do you think I've been a detective all my life for nothing?

[*He takes out a little pocket-glass and spies at the helmet.*]

THE AUNT

No fool would go to war now in a hat like that.

THE MOTHER

And there's a little silk-embroidered glove tied on it.

THE FATHER

So there is. "*Cherchez la femme!* . . ."

THE MOTHER

Is the trademark on it?

THE FATHER (*investigating*)

No.

THE AUNT (*approaching for a closer view, outraged*)

Well, I never saw such a thing!

THE MOTHER

Neither did I.

THE FATHER

Nor I.

ROSAMOND

It looks familiar to me. (*They turn and stare at her with one accord, petrified*) I've seen a pic . . .

[*She breaks off, eyeing her father.*]

THE MOTHER

Where did you see a picture of it, Rosamond?

ROSAMOND

I don't know. I can't remember. But it goes with the castle. (*She racks her brain. Memory becomes clearer*) There was a white horse, too, with scallops on its neck.

THE MOTHER (*faintly*)

A scalloped horse.

THE AUNT

Well, all I can say is, an automobile looks better to me at this moment than any horse. Let's go back to the road.

THE FATHER

Yes. That's sensible.

[*He leaves the helmet on the log. Rosamond goes and kneels beside it, running her hand over the visor.*]

THE MOTHER

Come, Rosamond.

ROSAMOND

He had this down, so you couldn't see his face, but he was as beautiful as the morning.

THE AUNT (*sniffing*)

Who?

ROSAMOND

I don't remember.

THE MOTHER (*wearily*)

That's what you get for having a child along.

ROSAMOND (*still patiently trying to find out*)

What have you got, mother?

THE MOTHER

Come!

ROSAMOND

Can't we go to the castle?

THE FATHER

No.

ROSAMOND

I should love to.

THE FATHER

Come!

THE AUNT

Pay no attention to her. That's the way to make her mind.

THE FATHER (*separating vines*)

Through here.

THE MOTHER (*going*)

Come, Rosamond.

THE AUNT (*practising what she preaches*)

Here we all go back to the nice road, and Rosamond will be alone, and the bears will eat her.

[*The grown-ups disappear.*]

ROSAMOND

Wait. . . . (*She lifts the helmet, to lay it again in the vine tangle. She stoops, then starts back, holding her*

breath. Finally, gathering courage, she pushes away the vines on both sides, and, kneeling, raises in her arms the head of a fallen man. From his waving hair to his bare white neck, he is as beautiful as the morning) Oh, it's true. It's true.

[He opens his eyes.]

THE MAN (*in a spent whisper*)

Little maiden, . . .

ROSAMOND

Prince Charming! Prince Charming! . . .

THE PRINCE (*with a faint smile*)

Yes.

ROSAMOND

It's you.

THE PRINCE (*a little stronger*)

Yes.

ROSAMOND

I didn't know the castle — but I remember it now.

THE PRINCE

My castle.

ROSAMOND

Those long steps she ran down at midnight.

THE PRINCE

Cinderella.

ROSAMOND

But the slipper fit, and they made her. . . .

THE PRINCE

My wife.

ROSAMOND

She ought to be there now, living happy ever after.

THE PRINCE

I was coming home to her.

ROSAMOND

But where have you been?

THE PRINCE

To war.

ROSAMOND

Our war — our war, Prince Charming?

THE PRINCE

Yes.

ROSAMOND

But why?

THE PRINCE

To make the world safe for Fairyland.

[He stumbles to his feet, and, leaning on Rosamond, goes to the log and sits looking wistfully over the sunlit meadows. His long body is clad in silk and velvet rags and the remnants of silver armor beaten into a wondrous pattern.]

ROSAMOND

Oh, Prince Charming, was that in danger, too?

THE PRINCE

Grave.

ROSAMOND

Was it invaded?

THE PRINCE

No, abandoned.

ROSAMOND

What?

THE PRINCE

Hundreds of children grew up over night. When they failed to believe in us, we found ourselves abandoned.

ROSAMOND (*with a little pitying cry*)

Oh. . . .

[*He points out over the meadows.*]

THE PRINCE

Lo, the castle began to crumble, rock from rock, toward oblivion. I saw my princess frail and white, like a ghost strayed in the dawn. For we who were born of France were first to suffer. We sent the war call over the fairy world.

ROSAMOND

Did you? . . .

THE PRINCE

It went echoing out, through haunted woods and cobbled, winding alleys, through palace halls of glass and grim caves where dragons died, from wave to wave of coral-incrusted seas, unerring in the Cretan labyrinth, to where Aladdin's lamp gilds the old walls of Pekin.

ROSAMOND

They all came!

THE PRINCE

Yes. In a great ghostly army, swarming above the clouds. Once an airman saw us, passing by on his way to battle; but he died before he could tell any one.

ROSAMOND

Did you fight?

THE PRINCE

We fought lustily.

ROSAMOND

It never got into the papers.

THE PRINCE

Are you sure? Men believed in us again for a little span, in those days. They called on us so loudly that the barriers between us fell. It was easy to reach them; now — it is so hard to return.

ROSAMOND

Don't you want to?

THE PRINCE

My heart breaks for my home.

ROSAMOND

Have the other fairies all gone back again?

THE PRINCE (*sadly*)

Verily, all but me.

ROSAMOND

Why couldn't you?

THE PRINCE

I was the sorest wounded. (*He gestures across the meadow*) My neighbor, who wedded the Sleeping Beauty, cut his way to her through wicked, thorny tangles. What to him were wire and the barricades of war? On the other side, my neighbor, Puss in Boots, was ever a mighty rat slayer. What to him were the hardships of the trenches? (*He looks at her despairingly*) Oh, *all* the rest were warrior princes in their youth, and had killed giants and monsters, and protected their cities in many old affrays. But I, alack! What of these things had I done? I, who came of age with a fondness for little feet! I, who had never ridden forth, save to fit on slippers!

ROSAMOND (*pitying*)

Yes, my aunt says, every time we buy shoes, that's no real job for a man.

THE PRINCE

I thought upon my lady, and battled as I could. Wounded and spent, I dragged myself back to the border. . . .

ROSAMOND

But where was your white horse, with scallops on its neck?

THE PRINCE

I gave him away to some refugees with a cart. It was an old granddam and two children trying to get home, and the cart was very big and very heavy. Men, watching, said it would be superhuman for them to arrive. So I harnessed my horse, that flies over obstacles, before them; and now I know he is plowing up their garden.

ROSAMOND

Oh! . . . But you. . .

THE PRINCE

I started for home on foot. But when the war was over, men had forgotten us quickly. The paths to Fairyland were closed, as they had been before. I searched and searched, and found no opening.

ROSAMOND

I should think the Fairy Godmother. . . .

THE PRINCE

Ah, she! I called, "Oh, Fairy Godmother, grant me a single wish." And her voice came back on the wind, "I'll *sell* you one — or three at quite a bargain!" She, too, had been out of Fairyland, you see.

ROSAMOND

You had no money. . . .

THE PRINCE

No. But I kept on alone. At last, I found this path that had not closed.

ROSAMOND

Why hadn't it?

THE PRINCE

I'll tell you. Because, as I lay too weak to call, I saw four unknown soldiers pass into Fairyland.

ROSAMOND

Couldn't you make them hear?

THE PRINCE

No. I watched them march over the border, one by one. I had fallen in my weakness just on the wrong side.

ROSAMOND

My father and mother and aunt would fall in weakness, too, if they knew what border it was.

THE PRINCE

They have been here?

ROSAMOND

And I *said* it looked familiar to me! I *said* I had seen a picture of it somewhere! (*She picks up her book, which has been lying near the log, and turns the pages swiftly*) And here it is, Prince Charming! The forest, and the castle! See!

[*She sits down beside him, and they look at the book together.*]

THE PRINCE (*with new strength*)

'Twas not painted from this place. (*He points to the right*) But over yonder where the road leads up to the drawbridge.

ROSAMOND

The long steps are in front, instead of at the side.

THE PRINCE

I know that road so well.

ROSAMOND (*rising, and leaving the book on the log*)

Could you walk if you leaned on me?

THE PRINCE

Walk — there?

ROSAMOND (*offering her arm*)

Try, oh, try, Prince Charming! (*He looks up at her and smiles. Then, leaning on her, he rises and stands, swaying but erect. Together they walk slowly toward the edge of the trees*) It isn't very far. . . . There, see, you're going to make it! . . . Don't mind if my knees wobble, just lean a little harder. . . . Oh, it's the *edge*, Prince Charming!

[*He comes to the place where the trees break away from the meadow. One step beyond, and he stands, tall and straight and strong, smiling at her radiantly. She has not left the wood, but they are clasping hands across the boundary.*]

THE PRINCE

You have healed me.

ROSAMOND

I'm so glad.

[*With a beautiful courtly gesture, he lifts her little hand to his lips.*]

THE PRINCE

Farewell.

[*He turns to cross the meadow.*]

ROSAMOND (*calling after him*)

Prince Charming! . . . Prince Charming! (*He stops and turns back*) I thought you would take me with you.

THE PRINCE

There is no need.

ROSAMOND

But I want to go.

THE PRINCE

To Fairyland?

ROSAMOND

To your castle. I'd do anything when I got there — sweep the floor or mind the hearth, just the way — she used to.

THE PRINCE (*shaking his bright head*)

No, little maid.

ROSAMOND (*pleading*)

Wouldn't Cinderella be pleased? Oh, I *don't* believe she'd mind! . . . I'm lots too young to vamp you. . . .

THE PRINCE

Vamp me. . . .

ROSAMOND

The kind in the movies that always pursue heroes.

THE PRINCE (*in a voice from which his new-found strength has ebbed*)

You — go —

ROSAMOND (*nodding*)

To the movies, all the time, at home. (*The Prince leans against the nearest tree for support. His eyes close, and his white hand moves piteously to his heart*)

Oh, what is it? What's the matter?

THE PRINCE (*with his beautiful spent smile*)

One of my wounds.

ROSAMOND (*tenderly pitying*)

Oh, dear! . . .

[He pulls himself together, and turns to go.]

THE PRINCE

I tarry too long, little maiden.

ROSAMOND

Can't I . . . can't I go, too?

THE PRINCE

No.

ROSAMOND

I helped you from this side — couldn't you help me now?

THE PRINCE

Alack, I may not help you.

ROSAMOND (*wistfully*)

I s'pose there's something you'd get for having a child along.

THE PRINCE

Nay, nay, but you see. . . .

ROSAMOND

Don't spare my feelings, I know the worst, Prince Charming. My father and mother and aunt didn't want to bring me. There *is* a thing you get for having a child along. I don't mean to get in their way, but I do, and now they've gone and left me. They wouldn't care if I went to Fairyland. And, honestly, I think I'd be better understood there. I wouldn't want to come back after this road was closed, I'd be so *happy*. . . . (*She stretches out her arms to him*) Oh, Prince Charming, why — why can't you take me?

THE PRINCE (*sadly and kindly, but very firmly*)

Because you are going to grow up very soon.

[He starts across the meadow.]

ROSAMOND (*breaking down*)

Don't — don't leave me behind. . . .

THE PRINCE (*with a last radiant smile*)

Farewell, dear little maiden.

ROSAMOND (*sobbing outright*)

Prince Charming. . . . Prince Charming. . . .

[*But he is gone out of sight.*

Rosamond stands at the edge of the wood, looking after him. Gradually, her sobs die down. She forces a smile and waves.

The father, the mother, and the aunt all return, having missed her.

THE FATHER (*exploding*)

Well! Not even started!

THE MOTHER

Rosamond! Who are you waving to?

THE AUNT

To whom are you waving, Rosamond?

ROSAMOND (*turning sadly*)

He's gone now.

THE MOTHER

But, Rosamond, I never allow you to talk to strangers, and you've been doing it.

ROSAMOND

Oh, mother, you used to know him when you were a little girl.

THE MOTHER (*vaguely reassured*)

Did I? Of course, that's different. . . .

THE AUNT (*sniffing*)

I don't believe it, when we can't locate ourselves!
(*She nods wisely to the mother, and advances upon her victim*) Rosamond, what was his name?

ROSAMOND

Charming.

THE AUNT

I daresay.

ROSAMOND

His name was Charming.

THE AUNT (*in bitter triumph*)

You see!

THE FATHER

That's what we get for having a child along.

ROSAMOND (*hoping against hope*)

What have you got, father?

THE FATHER

Don't be silly.

ROSAMOND (*stating a fact without rancor*)

This is daily life.

[*The aunt sees the open book, and strides over to the log.*]

THE AUNT

Rosamond, if you don't explain yourself immediately, I shall take away the new book I bought for you, and never let you see. . . .

[*But Rosamond continues to look after the Prince. Enraged, the aunt picks up the volume. Then her gaze falls on the picture of the castle. Her mouth drops open. Seeing a crimson flower growing near her, she plucks it, compares it with some in the illustration, and finally throws it from her in a wild gesture.*]

It hits the father, who looks round in surprise.

THE AUNT (*sepulchrally*)

Charles! . . .

THE FATHER (*in normal tones*)

Susan? . . . (*She beckons to him with frantic motions. He comes to her, sees the picture, stares at the castle in horror, turns back, produces the microscopic lens from his pocket, and examines the picture in all its details. At the end of his investigation, he calls his wife's attention from Rosamond, in a voice loud with excitement*)
Abigail! . . .

[*The mother joins them. When she sees the picture, she clutches at her hair, so that her hat goes crooked, and wrings her hands in dismay.*

They all raise haggard faces to where the child stands facing the sunshine.

THE THREE (*with one helpless explosion*)

Rosamond! . . .

ROSAMOND (*without turning, in a dreamy little voice*)

She'll be running down to meet him with slippers on her feet.

[*They stare all the harder.*

CURTAIN

THE CLOSET
A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

RACHEL DUNN

SADIE

BRENDA

MADAM DUNN

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THE CLOSET

SCENE: *An upstairs corridor, narrow and dim, and cut in the center by a large old-fashioned closet, the double doors to which stand flung back on either side. The corridor boasts no window, and so a narrow flame from a gas jet on the left wall burns for illumination. All the things that habitually hang or lie in the closet are strewn about outside on the corridor floor. There is a lamp with a globular shade, all flowered. A small marble-topped table with a broken leg leans up against the right wall. There is a heap of dresses on the floor, and an old hat in a hatbox.*

When the curtain rises, a drab, sallow, tired woman of thirty-five is standing on a chair in the closet, flapping at its empty shelf with a dust cloth. Her hair, save for a few untidy, straight locks, is concealed by a sweeping cap, and her spare body is wrapped in a long apron. The lamp outside on the floor is being dusted lazily by a brawny young servant girl.

THE WOMAN (*turning on her chair*)

Hurry up with that lamp. I'm ready now.

THE GIRL (*dusting more assiduously*)

Yes'm.

THE WOMAN (*reaching out an impatient hand*)

Well. . . . Sadie!

SADIE

Gee, Mrs. Dunn, I can't do it no quicker. The shade'll bust on me.

RACHEL (*grimly*)

It better not. That lamp'll do for a boarder some day.

SADIE

Yes'm. (*She finishes, picks up the lamp, and carries it gingerly into the closet*) It's a beautiful shade, though cracked. I kinder hoped you'd give it to me for *my* room.

RACHEL (*placing the lamp on the shelf*)

Then you should have known better. Boarders get everything in this house, all that's fit to use, and most of what isn't; even our time's theirs, so's we have to steal it back for house-cleaning.

SADIE (*pleased with the idea*)

Say, ain't we a couple of jailbirds, with them yellin' for us downstairs.

RACHEL (*very sharply*)

You hurry and bring what's next!

[*Sadie returns to the corridor and scans the objects there.*]

SADIE

This hatbox went on the shelf. . . .

RACHEL

Leave that. It can go in the mission barrel down to church.

SADIE

Yes'm. That's all, for up there.

RACHEL (*trying to peer into the corridor*)

All? Didn't I have a tennis racket, — the one with the strings loose?

SADIE

Gee, Mrs. Dunn, you threw that away last year.

RACHEL

Yes, I guess I did. I hate old truck around. (*She gets off the chair*) There's that marble-top with the leg off. I've been at my husband to glue it on, I don't know how long. Then we could use that. You might mention it to him again, when we go downstairs. What's he doing this afternoon? Anything?

SADIE (*stating an everyday fact*)

Sittin' in the kitchen, with his feet on the stove.

RACHEL (*pulling her lips together*)

Um. . . . (*She takes up one end of the table*) Help me lift this in.

SADIE

Yes'm.

[*They carry the old table to the closet, and prop it up against the left of the back wall. Its broken leg still lies in the corridor.*]

RACHEL

Dust it.

[*Sadie obeys, and Rachel, going into the corridor, finds the leg. As Sadie joins her, she throws it into the closet, and it falls directly under the place where it should stand.*]

SADIE

Now the dresses on the hooks.

RACHEL

It's no sense keeping old cast-offs. What's good can go to the heathen. (*She kneels down beside the clothing, and rapidly sorts it over*) That brown wool. . . .

SADIE (*standing above her*)

Want me to take it?

RACHEL (*holding it up*)

Yes. And this. And this.

[*She heaps dresses into Sadie's arms.*]

SADIE

Gee, they don't make cloth so heavy nowadays.

RACHEL (*looking up briefly*)

I suppose you're glad, you lazy thing.

SADIE (*eyeing her over her burden*)

Say, Mrs. Dunn, you're awful cross house-cleanin'.

RACHEL

I'd like to know who wouldn't be. (*She takes a dark-blue taffeta into her hands*) Now I wonder about this.

SADIE

Handsome, ain't it? You must 'a' looked grand in that.

RACHEL

It wasn't mine. My husband's mother wore it. She died before you came here.

SADIE

Oh. Well, if I'd been your mother-in-law, I'd have got buried in a dress that stiff.

RACHEL (*ignoring her*)

Taffeta wears so poor. It's all split down the creases. No, I can't give a rag like that to the barrel. (*Running her finger along the folds, she shows long rents. Then she tosses the dress aside, and takes up another*) Here. Take this green. (*Next, she lifts from the floor a filmy little rose-colored frock*) And this — no, wait, what's in the pocket? (*She draws out a bit of folded white*) A baby's bonnet, stamped to embroider. Funny. Must have been something I never finished for Brenda. (*She replaces it in the pocket*) Speaking

of Brenda, — I might make that pink over for her. It's in good shape. (*She throws the rose dress on top of the taffeta, and looks at the two garments remaining*) Old coats — yes, take those.

[*Sadie staggers under the added weight.*]

SADIE

Gee. Where'll I take 'em to?

RACHEL (*getting to her feet*)

The kitchen. And tell Mr. Dunn to tie them up for me. And see that he does it before night, there's a mission meeting at eight.

SADIE (*going unsteadily out, right*)

Yes'm.

RACHEL (*calling after her*)

And don't let a boarder stop you with those clothes. . . .

SADIE'S VOICE (*languishing back*)

A-all right. . . .

[*Rachel stoops and picks up the two dresses, and carries them into the closet. The blue taffeta she hangs on a hook at the right of the table. Then she throws the pink dress over the back of the chair, which is still standing in the middle of the closet floor. These things done, she takes a last look round, sees all in order, breathes a long sigh, and, coming out of the closet, shuts the double doors across it. Going along the corridor to the gas jet, she is on the point of turning out the light, when a little girl of ten runs in from the opposite end of the corridor. She is a thin, wistful, small creature, and much excited.*]

THE LITTLE GIRL

Oh, mamma! . . .

RACHEL (*turning, impatient*)

Brenda? What is it?

BRENDA (*respecting the impatient voice*)

Nothing much, mamma.

[*Rachel turns back to the gas jet, and Brenda edges over to the nearer closet door. She has her fingers on the knob, when her mother turns and sees her.*]

RACHEL

What are you doing at that closet?

BRENDA

Opening the door.

RACHEL

What for?

BRENDA

I wanted to look in.

RACHEL

Well, you can't. That closet's just been cleaned. I can't have any dirt dragged into it now.

BRENDA

I wouldn't *go* in, I only wanted to *look* in.

RACHEL

The door's closed, and it's going to stay that way for a year.

BRENDA

Wouldn't you just hold it open a crack, and let me peek round it?

RACHEL

What foolishness have you got into your head now?

BRENDA

Please, mamma.

RACHEL

What do you think you're going to see in there?

BRENDA (*after a little pause*)

A skeleton.

RACHEL

Brenda Dunn!

BRENDA (*with round eyes*)

Is there one, mamma?

RACHEL

Of course there isn't.

BRENDA

Well, you see, mamma, I was over playing at Winnie's house, and her mother had company, and they were talking right there in the room. And all of a sudden, the company said, "My dear, there's a skeleton in *every* closet!" Well, I listened to that, because that's interesting, and what she'd been talking about before wasn't — some man breaking his promise, I think it was. . . .

RACHEL

Well?

BRENDA

So I looked at her, and I said, "We live in a boarding-house; please would we have one there?" And then she laughed and said, "Oh, oh, a different one in every room."

RACHEL

Oh, she did, did she?

BRENDA

So, of course, I can't go into the boarders' rooms and look in their closets, can I, mamma? And there isn't any skeleton in mine. The lady said she wasn't surprised to hear it. But I s'posed you wouldn't mind my investigating up here, where you only keep old things. . . .

RACHEL

You're awful backward for ten, Brenda. You hadn't ought to believe such foolishness.

BRENDA

Winnie's mother believed it. She nodded her head and said yes.

RACHEL

She meant something else.

BRENDA

Well, couldn't I just look in?

RACHEL

When people say, "a skeleton in the closet," they only mean there's something folks want to hide. Now, Sadie and I have just cleaned this one, and we saw everything in it, and there's nothing we'd hide from anybody.

BRENDA

Except from me. . . .

RACHEL

I won't have you giving in to notions that way. There isn't any skeleton in that closet, Brenda. Nor in any other, here in the house. Now you take my word for it, and run off and play. (*She goes back to the gas jet and turns it quickly down. The corridor is very dim indeed*) Such foolishness!

BRENDA

But I think you might. . . .

RACHEL

Brenda!

[*The child turns and starts off, right.*]

BRENDA (*sighing*)

All right, mamma. It's too dark now, anyway. . . .

RACHEL (*following*)

As if I didn't have enough to do without being disobeyed and made to listen to such nonsense when I'm house cl. . . .

[Her voice dies away, as they disappear.]

For a moment, nothing happens. Then Brenda slips back noiselessly. She tiptoes to the closet, barely visible in the dimness, and waits, listening and looking back. There is no sound anywhere. Convinced that she has not been caught, she opens the closet door a tiny crack. Then she jumps back with a little cry, for a narrow streak of yellow light comes pouring through the crack.

BRENDA (*softly and scared*)

Oh . . . oh. . . .

[The light persists. She hesitates, gathering up more courage, and finally gives a bold push to the double doors. They swing back on either side, revealing the closet again.]

Now the lamp on the shelf is sound and whole, and diffusing a comfortable glow of yellow light. The table, also unbroken, stands out from the wall at the left. On the chair beside it sits Rachel, young and pretty at twenty-five, and dressed in the rose-colored frock. She is embroidering the bit of baby finery. Standing at her right, against the wall from which the hooks have disappeared, is an elderly woman, tall and stern of aspect, who wears the dark blue taffeta. It stands out stiffly about her, free from rents. She watches Rachel, who is sewing nervously. Brenda, lost in the corridor's dimness, watches, too.

MADAM DUNN

That's the third time you've pricked your finger.

[Rachel's voice comes, no longer weary and dulled, but vibrant.]

RACHEL

Yes, I — I know how many times it is.

MADAM DUNN

You shouldn't get all worked up, thinking about old things.

RACHEL *(turning to her)*

It's new things I'm worked up about. . . .

MADAM DUNN

New things?

RACHEL *(looking down at her work again)*

Yes.

MADAM DUNN *(stirred from her immobility)*

Have the people in this town found out?

RACHEL

About — him?

MADAM DUNN

Are you afraid to mention your husband's name?

RACHEL *(low)*

It isn't fear, exactly.

MADAM DUNN

Do they know what he — did, and where he really is?

RACHEL

No. I don't think so. They were asking me only last night, how long his firm would keep him abroad.

MADAM DUNN

Where was that?

RACHEL

At the dance for the High School Fund. . . .

MADAM DUNN *(with a sort of shocked horror)*

You went to a dance now. . . .

RACHEL

Yes. I met . . . (*her voice changes slightly*) . . . I met the doctor, and he urged me, just for a few minutes.

MADAM DUNN

You're always meeting him, and having him urge you somewhere.

RACHEL

I think he's kept me sane, making me ride with him, and play tennis, and get out among people.

MADAM DUNN (*with a curious inflection*)

Out among people. . . .

RACHEL (*wincing*)

Oh, I know — who can't. (*She turns, pleading*) But last night — I knew you were here with baby, and I didn't see the harm. . . . Oh, I've been so wretched, I thought it might help. But all the time I danced, I thought about — what — *he* was doing.

MADAM DUNN

What did you say to them about him?

RACHEL

I said — three years. That's the rest of the time — isn't it?

MADAM DUNN

Yes, yes.

RACHEL

And *they* said baby'd be quite a girl when her father saw her again!

MADAM DUNN

Well, — so she will. . . .

RACHEL (*low*)

If he sees her again.

MADAM DUNN

What do you mean by that?

[Rachel thrusts the embroidery into her pocket, and goes over to the older woman.]

RACHEL

Mother. . . . *(The word, for a moment, halts her)* I mean I. . . I want to get a divorce from him.

MADAM DUNN

You want. . . .

RACHEL

A wife can, you know, when a man's in prison.

MADAM DUNN

But you'd have to say that. . . .

RACHEL

Yes. Of course!

MADAM DUNN

And then people would know. I want to die where they don't know about it.

RACHEL

But I couldn't get one any other way.

MADAM DUNN *(after a pause)*

Don't you — love him at all?

RACHEL

No. *(Madam Dunn comes down and sits in the chair)*

It's hard to say that to you — you're his mother.

MADAM DUNN

And you're his wife. You ought to stand by him now.

RACHEL

Oh, why ought I? If I loved him, that would be different. But I don't. You know how it was between us. He — he rushed me into marrying him. And I'd found out my mistake — even before baby came.

MADAM DUNN (*with a stern wistfulness*)

I wish I could defend him.

RACHEL

But you don't. Oh, what liking I had left for him, that forgery destroyed. That forgery that came just after baby was born — think of it! Could I like him?

MADAM DUNN

For better, for worse — for worse, also, . . .

RACHEL

I don't see why.

MADAM DUNN

That's your promise.

RACHEL

When the three years were up, I should dread his coming home.

MADAM DUNN

You'd get over that.

RACHEL

And he'd want to touch baby.

MADAM DUNN

Well, he's her father. . . .

RACHEL (*turning away*)

Yes.

MADAM DUNN

And what's to become of her, with you divorced?

RACHEL

The doctor — wants to marry me.

MADAM DUNN (*slowly*)

Oh! . . . That's it.

RACHEL

He wants to. And I want him to. *He* — does love me. He's willing to take baby. He'll adopt her, and

she'll grow up with a good name, and never know the difference.

MADAM DUNN

She'd find out.

RACHEL

No, we'd go away again somewhere. He could practise in some other place; he's young, and he's been left well to do. I'd send you money, so you'd never need to take boarders, like now. . . .

MADAM DUNN

So that doctor — *knows*.

RACHEL

Not about *him* — not yet. Only that there's no love lost between husband and wife. He told me last night that he'd suspected that from the first time we called him to see baby. But when he knows the rest, — he won't mind. He's a *man*, a real man. . . . (*Madam Dunn buries her face in her hands*) Oh, I didn't mean to say that!

MADAM DUNN (*still with bowed head*)

It's all right.

RACHEL

He's coming here to-day — and then I'll tell him. I can't keep anything from him, because he loves me so much. I've never been loved his way before. It's wonderful, even in misery.

MADAM DUNN (*looking up at her*)

You talk like a girl.

RACHEL

Sometimes, I almost feel like a girl again. Don't you see — I've a chance to begin all over. It's not too late. Instead of this — this torment, all the time —

I can be happy, just like other women — with my man. And baby. She's such a little tiny thing now. It's quite as if she hadn't lived through this. She can grow up like other children. Happy and well provided for. We'd both be so happy, baby and I.

MADAM DUNN

And I? (*Rachel looks at her*) What would that do to me?

RACHEL (*hesitant*)

Would you come with us — at least, for these three years?

MADAM DUNN

It's not likely I would.

RACHEL

Oh. . . . I suppose it *is* selfish, to leave you alone in the wreck.

MADAM DUNN

Selfish? After all our plans, for you to bring shame down on us?

RACHEL

It's not my shame!

MADAM DUNN

But we can hide it, — just as we have right along.

RACHEL

There was no hope for me then.

MADAM DUNN (*faltering*)

I thought — I thought God directed us to this town, where no one ever heard of us before. But that young doctor had to be here, too. In this one place, of all the towns in the world.

RACHEL

He'll make it easier for *you*.

MADAM DUNN

Do you call it easy, taking charity? No; and boarders will never come, once they have found out.

RACHEL

Don't make it so hard.

MADAM DUNN

If you ever intended to go back on my son and me, why did you let me come? Why did you let me pack up everything I had, and say good-by to all my friends who, after all, did pity me? Why did you let me, poor and old and tired as I am, go to all that wrenching and work, so you could leave me, bowing my head among strangers?

RACHEL

I didn't know. . . .

MADAM DUNN

Because you know now, does that make any difference?

RACHEL

Oh . . . you — think — think what you'd do in my place.

MADAM DUNN

I wouldn't bring shame on my baby, and myself, and an old woman.

RACHEL

I don't feel that way. I'd be throwing the shame off, once for all. And, oh, I've got so *long* to live!

MADAM DUNN (*the stoic in her breaking*)

And I've got too long. I wish to God I could die.

RACHEL

You — why, you've always been so strong-minded, so brave. . . .

MADAM DUNN

There's limits when people suffer.

RACHEL

Mother. . . .

MADAM DUNN (*drawing away from her*)

Don't you mother me.

RACHEL

I. . . .

MADAM DUNN

I've only got one child, and he's in prison. He can't get to me, and I'm all at the mercy of strangers. . . .

RACHEL

Don't talk that way. . . .

MADAM DUNN

I fought as hard as I could, but I'm old, and somehow I can't stop things from going wrong. . . .

RACHEL (*coming to kneel by her side, pleading*)

Please — please. . . .

[*Madam Dunn gets up from her chair, leaving Rachel kneeling beside it, and walks unsteadily upstage right, where suddenly she collapses, sobbing, against the wall.*]

MADAM DUNN

I can't save my own son — and the baby — and all of us from disgrace. . . . I can't do anything. . . .

I can't even die . . . die, oh, God, please. . . .

[*She sobs, the terrible sobs of an old woman. Rachel, shivering, pulls herself up from the floor, till she is sitting in the chair again. Somewhere a bell rings. Rachel listens. Madam Dunn grows more quiet.*]

RACHEL (*in a queer, choked voice*)

That's the — doctor.

MADAM DUNN (*fighting for control*)

Maybe — 'tis.

[*A pause. The bell, a faint sound, rings again.*]

RACHEL (*at last*)

If you'll — let him in — I'll tell him — he can't have me . . . ever. . . .

[*The bell rings a third time. Both women are listening, both placed exactly where they were when Brenda opened the closet door. At this moment, there comes a loud voice from the corridor.*]

SADIE'S VOICE (*off right*)

Brenda! Brenda! . . .

[*Brenda, hearing it, runs and closes the double doors. The corridor is dim and still, when Sadie enters.*]

BRENDA

Here I am, Sadie.

SADIE (*advancing on her*)

Well, it's a good thing. Your ma's just let in the doctor, Mis' Bartlett on the second floor's took sick. You'll be needed to get medicine from the drug store. Besides, I want some kindlin' for the stove. Your dad's too comfortable to get it, and I'm too busy.

BRENDA (*starting past her*)

I'll do both.

SADIE (*stopping her with a large hand*)

Say, you been in that closet?

BRENDA

No! — Oh, no, Sadie!

SADIE

Honest?

BRENDA

Cross my heart.

SADIE

Your mother wanted to know.

[*She starts to open the doors.*]

BRENDA

Oh! — You'd better not go in!

SADIE (*stopping*)

Why not?

BRENDA

There's somebody there. . . .

SADIE (*with much suspicion*)

Huh! — Who?

BRENDA

They didn't say their names, and I don't think I ever saw them before.

SADIE

Why didn't you ask?

BRENDA

They were too busy. If you'd seen them, you wouldn't have, either.

SADIE

If I had, I'd be runnin' yet. (*Hands on hips, enjoying herself, she surveys Brenda*) And what are they doing in your mother's closet?

BRENDA (*reflecting*)

Well, they seemed to be feeling badly. But I couldn't make out just why.

SADIE (*her grin broadening*)

Betcher couldn't.

BRENDA

They were expecting the doctor, too.

SADIE (*tapping her forehead*)

And you're the one that needs him the most! . . .
(*She flings the doors wide. It is pretty dark inside, but one can see that the closet is as Rachel, house-cleaning, left it. Sadie goes in and peers about. Returning to the corridor she speaks impressively, pointing backward with her thumb*) Well, it's a good thing for you that nothing happened there! C'mon now, you got to work. . . .

CURTAIN

THE DOG
A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First produced in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, by the
Little Theatre Guild, on November 23 and 24, 1922.

CHARACTERS

THE WOODSMAN

THE CITY MAN

TINY

SEVERAL VOICES

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BY DORIS F. HALMAN.

THE DOG

SCENE: *Interior of a shack in the Maine woods, at twilight. A small, rough room. The door from outside is at left, back. Two very small windows, one open near the door in the back wall, the other on the left, show a background of dark evergreen trees. A door into a lean-to is in the right wall. The furniture consists of an unpainted table, a bunk under the side window, and a chair made out of a barrel. A bright chromo of homely dogs hangs at the back, between the door and window. Disorder of gun and spade and other tools reigns in the corners; mittens and bits of rope are scattered on the floor.*

The curtain rises on a burst of derisive laughter. The interior of the shack, dimly seen, is empty; but at once the door is flung open, and a girl bounds into the room, slamming and bolting the door behind her. The light is enough to show that she is very young and very slight, and garbed in an ultra-modern hunting regalia.

There follows a pounding of fists on the door, more laughter, and cries of, "Oh, come out, Tiny!" The girl flings angrily away from the door. Then the well-combed, grinning head of a man appears in the open window.

THE CITY MAN

Come on, Tiny. The dog can't bite you! You really shot it dead, you know!

TINY (*petulant and childish*)

Go away!

THE CITY MAN

And *we* won't bite you, either, even if you did make us think it was a bear.

TINY

Let me alone!

THE CITY MAN

And made us walk a mile to see it! — Oh, we've forgiven you for the joke's sake! — You needn't be scared of us!

TINY

Will you tell the rest of them, at the camp?

THE CITY MAN

Will we? Oh, say, Tiny! We really must take the prize back with us and exhibit it — such a corking joke — a dog!

TINY

Then I won't come out.

THE CITY MAN

My dear child, . . .

TINY

I won't come out — to be the laughing-stock of the whole camp!

THE CITY MAN

You can't stay there.

TINY

Why not?

THE CITY MAN

My dear Tiny, has it occurred to you that the owner of the mansion you've invaded may also be the owner of the dog?

TINY

No, but — but I don't care!

THE CITY MAN

No?

TINY

I can apologize to him, or pay him, or something; and anyhow, I'd rather be on anybody's mercy than on yours!

THE CITY MAN

Whew! . . .

TINY

I had! You're a lot of teasing brutes.

THE CITY MAN

Now, Tiny, . . .

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*interrupting*)

Oh, let her alone. You can't reason with Tiny. She'll come to her senses if we leave her here.

TINY (*defiant*)

Thank you, sister!

[*The man's head momentarily disappears; then returns, as its owner throws two small objects through the window.*]

THE CITY MAN

Here, angel child, are my check book and a box of matches. Make yourself comfortable, and settle your debts as best you may!

TINY

I don't want your help!

THE CITY MAN

Tell your new friends we took their dog, but left you to fill the vacancy. So long!

[*He disappears. With the woman's voice saying, "Come along, folks," the laughing murmurs of the others trail off after him.*]

When Tiny can hear them no longer, she runs to the

window, peers out, turns away reassured, unbolts the door to see better, closes it, and lights the lamp on the table. The glow reveals her pretty, foolish face, and the roughness of the room. She begins to look about, giggling over the barrel chair, the big mitten, the chromo on the wall. In the midst of this, a faint but long and clear whistle comes from the woods. She stops and listens; then stamps her foot, says "Huh!" and louder, "I won't come." Then she returns to her inspection of the room.

In the darkness of the window, a man's face appears. Tiny, being occupied in trying on the mitten, does not see it. In a moment, the door swings open softly, and a tall, lank man of middle age stands on the threshold, looking at her. After a glance, he stoops and picks up a wooden packing box loaded with bundles, which he has set down to open the door. It fills his arms. Tiny does not hear him until, standing in the doorway, he speaks.

THE WOODSMAN

Well, how do! (*With a squeal of fear, she jumps about to face him*) Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. Land, I'm real glad to see you.

[*As he advances into the lamplight, smiling at her with gentle amusement, she grows reassured.*]

TINY

Th-thank you. (*He begins to look expectantly about the room. She calls back his attention to her*) Please forgive me for intruding in your house.

THE WOODSMAN

Why, that's all right — all right. (*He puts his bundles on the table beside the lamp*) Seemed mighty good to

find the shack all lighted up, just as if it was waitin' for me. I'd ought to be grateful to you.

TINY (*pleased*)

Oh! . . . Do you live all alone?

THE WOODSMAN

No, indeed! There's Bill; but Bill ain't much of a hand at lightin' up.

TINY (*looking round half fearfully*)

Bill?

THE WOODSMAN

Yeah! Ain't you seen him?

[*For so rough a specimen, his voice has grown surprisingly tender. Now he goes to the door and repeats the whistle heard before. Tiny giggles.*]

TINY

Was that whistle in the woods just now meant for Bill? How funny! I thought it was for me!

THE WOODSMAN

Just to let him know I'm home. (*A little pause, while he waits in the open door*) I guess he's down in the woods, huntin' rabbits. (*He comes back into the room*) Bet he done it on purpose! — he's kinder mad with me, Bill is.

TINY

Oh, how too bad.

THE WOODSMAN (*smiling*)

Yeah. You see, Bill generally goes to town when I do. . . .

TINY

You mustn't tell me your private affairs, unless you want to!

THE WOODSMAN

What . . . ?

TINY

I mean — if you quarreled. . . .

THE WOODSMAN (*shaking his head*)

'Twarn't what you'd call a real quarrel. Only I wouldn't take him along to-day, because he's been so kinder sick lately.

TINY

Was he angry about that?

THE WOODSMAN

Well, I dunno. The critters on this earth never take much of a likin' to what's good for 'em. And Bill, he come out on the step there to see me off, with the saddest face I ever looked at. It hurt me to leave him, it did. But . . . (*he chuckles*) I've brought him a peace-offerin' along of the supplies! (*He fumbles among his parcels*) He'll be tickled to death when he gets it. Look a' here! . . .

[*He produces a huge meat bone. Tiny, who has been listening to all this quite at her ease, suddenly realizes the truth. She jumps up, walks a few steps, and asks faintly.*]

TINY

Is Bill — a dog?

THE WOODSMAN

Why, sure! Any one who didn't know him would call him that, I guess.

TINY

Oh, dear! . . .

THE WOODSMAN

But you needn't act so scairt, little lady; he wouldn't

hurt you for anything. He ain't a mite ugly. When he shows up, you just pet him.

TINY (*trying to smile*)

You — you talked as if Bill were a man. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Did I? Well — that's about the size of him, to me.

TINY

Oh . . . oh . . . you like him — don't you?

THE WOODSMAN (*simply and tenderly*)

Yeah.

TINY

And — I suppose — you've had him — a long while?

THE WOODSMAN

Ten year.

TINY

He — he's old . . . isn't he?

THE WOODSMAN (*quick and sharp*)

Not yet.

TINY (*lamely*)

Oh, I thought that was old.

[*The woodsman goes to the door, whistles again, and stands waiting. Tiny takes the check book from her pocket, frowns, glances from it to him, and then folds it into the palm of her hand.*]

I suppose you do get attached to a dog you've had that long.

THE WOODSMAN (*coming down, reminiscent*)

Yeah, it was ten year ago that he come, like it was out of nowheres . . . like it was God sent him — one dark stormy night. I was hidin' here because I'd killed a man . . . you needn't get scairt, 'twas a case of self-defense, but, you see, I couldn't prove it.

So I was mighty lonesome, days and nights in the big woods, with no one to talk to — I'd always been a kind of a sociable feller, you see, — and that night, things seemed worse, somehow, and I come mighty near to killin' myself, too.

TINY (*half in horror, half in pity*)

Oh . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Yeah. But I didn't do it. Because I heard a thump-in' at the door there, and when I went to see, Bill was a-lyin' on the step . . . a little, sick, wet puppy — but some one to talk to — you know. . . .

[*He breaks off, overwhelmed by his own shy eloquence, and whistles again.*]

TINY (*low, twisting her hands*)

I wish you wouldn't do that.

THE WOODSMAN

Guess you're right. The little cuss won't come, long's he knows he's wanted. (*Chuckling, he shuts the door*)
We'll show him.

TINY

I — I was saying — how attached to him you are.

THE WOODSMAN

Ever had one?

TINY

No. I live with my sister, and she thinks they're horrid.

THE WOODSMAN

And where does your sister live?

TINY

Boston. What's that got to do with it?

THE WOODSMAN

Well, I should say it had something to do with you. It's gettin' kinder dark outside, little lady, and I was just thinkin' you'd better start for home.

TINY (*newly alarmed*)

Oh, I can't! Don't make me go till they get real frightened about me!

THE WOODSMAN

I want to know! Why?

TINY

Because then they won't laugh.

THE WOODSMAN (*grinning*)

Oh, I see. You're lost.

TINY (*trying to face him*)

No, I — I (*She loses courage*) Yes, yes.

THE WOODSMAN

Well, I guess we can fix that easy. Where you stop-ping?

TINY

At that big brown bungalow. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

About a mile down the road. Yeah. (*He comes near her and puts his hand on her shoulder*) Now, listen: you let me take you into sight of the house, and then you can go on in alone, and say you never got lost at all. How's that?

TINY

Oh, no — no, thank you! It wouldn't do any good!

THE WOODSMAN

Sho!

TINY

They simply must come after me, or I won't budge a step!

THE WOODSMAN

Ain't it mean to make 'em look for you?

TINY

But they know where I. . . . Oh, dear!

[She breaks off with a squeal, and claps her free hand to her mouth.]

THE WOODSMAN

I thought you said you got lost.

TINY

Not exactly.

THE WOODSMAN

I guess I don't quite see what the matter is.

TINY

N-no. I'll tell you. I've — got to.

THE WOODSMAN

Maybe you'd better.

TINY (*pleading at him*)

Well — I'm the youngest person at our camp . . . and the others laugh at me. They only took me along, because it was my sister's party. She called it her hunting party, and I got all ready. . . . (*She breaks off*) Now, don't *you* laugh!

THE WOODSMAN

I won't laugh.

TINY

No, I — I don't think you will.

THE WOODSMAN

And you was sayin' . . .

TINY

So far, all they've done is play cards and dance. But I was disappointed. I wanted to go hunting, and they roared. They said, "Oh, Tiny couldn't hit a skyscraper!" — and — "The baby would jump if a twig crackled!" So I — I just thought I'd show them! [*She stops, eyeing him fearfully.*]

THE WOODSMAN

Good for you.

TINY (*more and more nervous*)

And to-day . . . to-day I took my gun, and I came out to — shoot something.

THE WOODSMAN (*amused and admiring*)

Well, well.

TINY (*taking heart at his tone*)

I walked, and I walked. And there *were* noises! But I kept right on, and by and by — near here — up by the road . . . I saw . . . (*she has worked herself to the pitch of confession; now she falters, and backs a little away from him*) . . . an animal.

THE WOODSMAN (*seeking to calm her*)

I ain't goin' to laugh.

TINY

It was moving through the trees. It looked grayish-brown and awful big. I thought it was a bear.

THE WOODSMAN (*his eyes a-twinkle*)

A rabbit's grayish-brown.

TINY

Oh, it — it — it was bigger than a rabbit.

THE WOODSMAN

You don't say. (*In spite of his promise, he smiles at her*) And you was too scairt to pot it.

TINY

No, no! I aimed, and I pulled the *thing*, and there was a dreadful noise. Then I ran all the way home without looking!

THE WOODSMAN

And your folks wasn't exactly sorry for you!

TINY

No.

THE WOODSMAN

You hadn't ought to have told 'em.

TINY

But, you see, — I didn't dare to come back alone.

THE WOODSMAN

Back? What for?

TINY

Why, to find it! . . . I was so sure. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Oh. (*He turns away to hide a grin*) So they came, did they, a-lookin' for the bear?

TINY

Yes. (*Then, very faintly*) As far as . . . here.

THE WOODSMAN

. . . Laughin' all the way. Now, don't think about it, if it makes you feel bad; and I'll tell you what we'll do. (*He points to the lean-to door*) Right in there's as fat a pair of rabbits as the Lord makes in these here woods. Bill and me got 'em yesterday. (*Tiny winces again*) And neither Bill or me have got a particle of use for them rabbits. So we're a-goin' to give 'em to you.

TINY

Oh, no! . . . Please! . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Sure! Then you can say you kept on lookin', and found two whole rabbits, which is better than one bear. You can say the bullet went through first one and then t'other. And I'd like to be peekin' in the winder, when it comes your turn to laugh!

TINY (*wringing her little hands*)

Oh, why are you so good to me? You look rough, and you're not — you're not.

THE WOODSMAN (*pausing, sheepish, by the door*)

Well, — I guess you can thank Bill for that.

[*He disappears into the lean-to. Tiny flings out her arm to stop him, and sees the check book in her hand. It gives her an idea. She goes to the table, opens the book, and is seeking something to write with, when the woodsman returns. She is even chuckling a little at her cleverness.*]

THE WOODSMAN

Feelin' better?

TINY (*turning to him*)

Will you lend me your fountain pen?

THE WOODSMAN (*fishing in his pocket*)

Here it is. It's a pencil.

[*He tenders her a stub, and the rabbits almost touch her. She shrinks back, and falls sobbing into the chair.*]

TINY

Oh, I can't take them! . . . I can't! . . . I can't! . . .

THE WOODSMAN

They ain't exactly — girlish. But I'll carry 'em till we get nigh to the camp.

TINY

No. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

No? Well. . . . (*He scratches his head, and then is inspired*) S'pose I bring 'em to your place the first thing to-morrow, and inquire did any one go out shootin' the day before?

[*Tiny lifts her head and forces herself to smile at him.*]

TINY

Yes — that's fine. Wait — wait just a minute.

[*She begins to fill in the check.*]

THE WOODSMAN

What's that?

TINY

A check. I want to pay you.

THE WOODSMAN

No, indeedy, say, I don't want you to. . . .

TINY (*terribly earnest for once*)

I must. I must. I must.

[*She tears out the check, rises, folds it across, and hands it to him.*]

THE WOODSMAN

Well, thanks!

TINY

Good night. . . .

[*She runs to the door in feverish haste. Smiling a little, he has unfolded the check. She has her hand on the knob, when he calls her back.*]

THE WOODSMAN

Oh, say, miss, . . . a hundred dollars for a couple of rabbits! A hundred dollars! I can't take that.

[*Tiny comes slowly back, making no motion to take the paper he holds out, trying to think what to say. All she*

can manage is to look up into his face with tear-filled eyes and whisper.

TINY

Please! It's not — just — for the rabbits. . . .

[It is more the look on her silly little face than her words or the hundred dollars that makes him see the truth at last. The growing awfulness of his stare hypnotizes her. They stand there in silence. Suddenly he brushes her aside, tears open the door, and cries into the night.]

THE WOODSMAN

Bill! Bill!

[And then again the awful silence.]

TINY *(twisting and untwisting her hands)*

He can't come. I shot him. I didn't mean to.

THE WOODSMAN *(turning a drawn face to her)*

That — was what you done.

TINY

Yes. But I didn't mean to. . . .

THE WOODSMAN *(almost to himself)*

I should 'a' let him go to town with me. But I thought he was sick. *(Then, to her, very quietly)* Where'd you find him?

TINY

Lying on the step — there, outside. He must have come . . . you know. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Come home to die. *(He looks round)* He ain't here! *(Tiny sobs aloud. His tone changes)* Where is he?

TINY

Oh, I'm frightened! . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Where's Bill?

TINY (*gasping*)

They took him.

THE WOODSMAN (*terrible*)

They — took — *him!*

TINY

Because it was a joke.

THE WOODSMAN

Joke!

TINY

Oh, they didn't understand . . . they'll bring him back. . . .

THE WOODSMAN (*towering over her*)

I was good to you, by God, . . . and you let them do that . . . laugh at Bill dead. . . .

TINY

At me, too. I couldn't stop it, could I?

THE WOODSMAN

You stopped his livin', didn't you? You stopped me from talkin' to him, and seein' his brown eyes, and feelin' his warm head against my knee. You done that!

TINY

Cou — couldn't you get another?

THE WOODSMAN

What?

TINY

Another dog. He'd seem the same, after a while.

THE WOODSMAN

Oh, merciful God, you!

[*He tears the check with furious gestures. Tiny begins to cry again.*]

TINY (*taking the word from him*)

God knows. . . .

THE WOODSMAN

Yes, God knows a thing or two! God the Judge! (*He towers above her, awful*) You and me — both killed somethin'. A no-count sneak, he was, the feller I shot — a tramp, and a cheat, and a dirty soul; . . . that was a crime! And you took the life out of a dog! And God knows which was the worst! . . . But what good does that do me?

[*Very faintly there comes from the woods a sound of singing. The woodsman and Tiny stop short to listen. Then a faint pink glow steals in through the window. The singing comes nearer.*]

TINY

What's that? (*They listen again. The light grows brighter, is reflected in the doorway. The voices that we heard at the opening of the act are now recognized, very slowly and mournfully intoning something. The tum-tum-tum of their measure is broken by little spasmodic, nervous giggles. Tiny runs to the window*) It's my people! They didn't go back and leave me! You can't do anything now. They're coming to get me with torches. . . . OH. . . .

[*She breaks off with renewed terror.*]

THE WOODSMAN

Lemme look!

[*He starts for the window. The voices, coming nearer, identify their slow chant.*]

THE VOICES

"Oh, where. . . . Oh, where . . . has my little dog gone" . . .

TINY (*at the same time*)

No, no! (*She fights him off with weakly waving hands*)
They've got him — on a stretcher — all covered with
red leaves. . . . Oh, please. . . .

[*The woodsman snatches up his gun from its corner.*

THE WOODSMAN (*speaking through the music*)

They're fillin' my ears with that joke of theirs . . .
now they're a-goin' to hear somethin', too, . . . goin'
to have somethin' to take back on that. . . .

[*He levels the gun at Tiny.*

TINY (*wildly*)

Oh, don't! . . . (*She throws herself down at his feet*)
Don't shoot me. . . .

[*Nearer and nearer come the silly voices. The woodsman
stares down at Tiny's dumb helplessness. Suddenly he
says, in a strange tone:*

THE WOODSMAN

Bill on the step — to-day — pleadin' to go with me
— and you on the floor — now — lookin' at me —
lookin' — with eyes — eyes — that way! . . . (*He
flings the gun aside. The whole place flickers with the
pink glow. The woodsman seems like a graven image
endowed with speech*) Get out of here. (*Tiny pulls
herself to her feet, looks at him, starts to speak. The
voices come under the window. Blessed with a single
intuition, she goes very quickly out. A wild burst of
shouting greets her. Then suddenly, it becomes still
outside. The woodsman stands motionless in the room,
as the pink light of the torches begins to recede, first
from door, then from window, the way it came. When
it is quite gone, he goes with great strides to the door.*

CURTAIN

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

First produced in Cambridge, Mass., by the 47
Workshop, on December 8 and 9, 1916.

CHARACTERS

THE WHITE-FACED GIRL

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

THE POET'S WIFE

THE SERVING-MAID

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BY DORIS F. HALMAN.

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WILL-O'-THE-WISP

SCENE: *Interior of a farmhouse at the end of things. A plain, gray room, with black furniture and a smoke-blackened fireplace. Door to outside, left back. Door to stairs, right. Fireplace in upper right-hand corner; armchair in lower right-hand corner. Below the door, left, a square table with a chair at either side. The whole center of the wall, back, is taken up by a huge window, through which one can glimpse the black spaces of a moor rising in the distance to a sharp cliff-head silhouetted against the intense blue of an early evening sky. With the passage of the action, this blue fades into a starless night. There are two candles burning in the room, one on the table, the other on a shelf above the armchair.*

When the curtain rises, the countrywoman, an old and withered dame, is lighting the candle on the table. Crouching by the fireplace at the other side of the room is the ragged figure of a girl with a white face and big wistful eyes, a strange little figure wearing a tight-fitting gray cap which covers all her hair, a silent figure, never speaking. Until she lifts her head, she is little more than a dim gray heap in the shadows.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

. . . So I don't know what's to become of me any more, with my one boarder gone. A poet he was, to be sure, but a good one; and he paid me enough every summer to keep my soul and body together

through the rest of the long year. Seven summers he came that way, and now the time's gone by, and I hear never no word. How I'm to keep myself alive I don't know; and since I've took you in, bless you, there's the two of us. It may be you'll have to go again, the way you came, out of the night, though you're a great comfort bein' here to talk to, and a help to me in my work. Not but what you'd be more comfort yet, if your poor tongue weren't cursed with dumbness! (*She turns away, sighing, and a queer smile flickers over the stray's face*)

Dear sake, yes, I'm growin' used to you. But a stray who comes to the land's end is as welcome as any other. Nor are those likely to reach here at all, who aren't vagabonds — or poets. By which I think that my poet is gone for good, and you must follow after, and then I'll be left to dwell for the rest of my days alone with the spirits of the moor and of the sea beyond. Oh, alack! (*She sits down, wiping her eyes*) I'll not forget the night you came. A month ago it was, the second of June; and the day before was the time the poet always come, himself. When I see your white face peerin' in through the window there, thought 'twas him, late, and lookin' in for the joke of it, to see if I'd given him up. Then in another minute you was standin' in the door, poor white creature that you were. And behind you was the wind sweepin' over the moor, and the waves sighin' up the cliff head from the sea. God knows where you come from, and you couldn't tell. But you're not troublesome. (*The creature smiles at her, as the old woman goes over to her, and pats her shoulder*)

No, you're not. Neither was he. Off all the time he was, with the will-o'-the-wisps of the field and the mermaids of the deep, learnin' their sweet songs. No trouble at all, either of you; — only, he paid. (*A knock at the door. The old woman starts and cries out joyfully. As she hurries to open, she does not notice that the girl's face grows illumined as she stretches forth her thin arms in a gesture of infinite grace*)

He's come! After four weeks, at last! He'll pay again!

[*The door, opened by her, reveals a woman in her thirty-fifth year, dressed in the extreme of style. She enters, followed by a black-clad maid, who carries a traveling bag. Disappointed, but amazed, the old woman falls back before her. By this time, the figure near the fireplace is crouching expressionless as before.*]

THE STYLISH LADY

Is this the farmhouse at the land's end?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Yes, so please you.

[*She courtsies as well as her bent back will permit. The stray's eyes have gone from the lady to the maid, and are fixed on the servant when the lady speaks.*]

THE LADY

Ah! . . . You may set down the bag, Nora.

THE MAID (*with a soft brogue*)

Yes, ma'am.

[*She gazes nervously about the dusky room.*]

THE LADY (*to the countrywoman*)

My husband sent me to you.

[*Quick as a flash, the stray's big eyes are fastened on the lady. They never waver, till the end of the scene.*]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Your husband? How? There are no husbands at the land's end. Nobody but me.

THE LADY

My husband has been here. He used to board with you, in the summer time.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Oh! The poet?

THE LADY

Yes. I am the poet's wife.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

But. . . .

THE LADY

We've not been married very long. (*She hastens to add, with a forced sigh*) Of course, it pained me to leave him! But I was so wearied from social pleasures that he *wanted* me to rest; and what was I to do? I was even growing bored, not being as fresh as he to such fulness of life. But you can know nothing of that, here at the end of things. You've never seen the world?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*glancing through the window*)

I've seen how big it is, and how—queer.

[*Her voice grows hushed with awe. Follows a slight pause. The serving maid becomes aware of the crouching stray, and moves farther away, crossing herself. The lady's stare at the old woman ends in a burst of laughter.*]

THE LADY

Oh, how amusing! I think I shall enjoy my stay with you. Will you take me in for a while?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*cackling with pleasure*)

Now, by all the clouds in the sky to-night, I will!

THE LADY

I shall require a room for myself, and another for my maid.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

And your husband, good ma'am? Doesn't he come?

THE LADY

No. I thought better not. . . . There seemed to be some influence here that was not good for him.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Here, ma'am? At the land's end he loved so much?

THE LADY (*laughing unpleasantly*)

Oh, I don't deny he found his inspiration in this neighborhood. Summer brought his best work, every one knows that. Tell me, how did he use to spend his time?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Why, most of it, out there.

[*She waves her hand toward the darkening scene beyond the window.*]

THE LADY (*sitting at the right of the table*)

Ah? You see, he never told me about it in detail, for fear I — couldn't understand. But you think I can understand, don't you?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Good ma'am, are you acquainted with the spirits?

THE LADY

Certainly not! What spirits?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Those he knew.

THE LADY

Oh! So he did have other friends — beside yourself?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

They was all his friends, good ma'am. He's the only person I ever knew could walk on the moor by night, without the will-o'-the-wisp should dance him over the cliff. Instead o' that, it taught him the tune it dances to, and he made a song out of it. My own man ventured into the darkness years ago, and never came back more. But the poet and It was friends.

THE LADY

A will-o'-the-wisp, what is that?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*in a voice of awe*)

It's what keeps you in the house o' nights. It's a wavin' light that beckons you to follow it. And when you've been for miles and miles, always behind, why, then it leaves you; and the morning finds you dead in a ravine, or floatin' under the cliff head in the sea.

THE LADY (*laughing*)

Oh, really! What a pleasant companion for my husband! (*The crouching figure creeps forward a bit from its place by the fireside. Again the maid, flattened against the wall, crosses herself*) But pray tell me — whom else did he know?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Poor Will, a goblin who cries through the land's end, under the curse of an old, old sin. And the mermaids with green hair, that sing when a ship goes down.

THE LADY

Did my husband tell you all this?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Yes, good ma'am, and more; whenever for hunger he come home, he had a tale for me.

THE LADY

And you believed it?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

He was a dear young man, I'm not even blamin' the spirits, that they loved him.

THE LADY (*laughing*)

But, I mean, do you believe in *spirits*?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

How could I choose? I see them, I hear them. The night your husband should have come — that was the first of June — I saw the will-o'-the-wisp out yonder on the moor, as plain as I see my candles. Not dancin' it was, but goin' quite slow and steady-like, with its lantern lit, as if it was seekin' him. And I'm not wonderin' if, sooner or later, it didn't come peepin' and lookin' through this very window into my house, to find the friend it missed.

THE LADY

Oh, what nonsense! What utter, silly bosh!

[*The serving maid comes down to the left of the table, speaking in a worried whisper.*]

THE MAID

I'd not be sayin' the like, ma'am, if I was you. It's offerin' the goblins temptation.

THE LADY (*turning, astonished*)

What? You, too, Nora? I thought you had more sense.

THE MAID

In the old country, ma'am, it's the way with us all, to believe.

THE LADY

Oh, dear me! Well, I can't grow superstitious, Nora, just to oblige you. That will do.

THE MAID

Yes, ma'am. . . . But I think I'll be leaving you.

THE LADY

What?

THE MAID

Oh, it's afraid I am, what with the old woman's talk, and the look of the moor outside. We'd better be going, ma'am, the both of us. There's no good waits for us here.

THE LADY

You may go when you please. For myself, I prefer to stay and meet — some of my husband's friends. I shall certainly not be frightened away by the tales my husband — left behind for me.

[She laughs again unpleasantly; and the creeping figure comes very near her chair. Across the table, the maid bursts into tears, and sinks down in the chair opposite.]

THE MAID (*sobbing*)

How shall I take my way back, alone. Oh, the Lord pity me!

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

There, there, good soul, the spirits wish you no harm, they'll not hurt you.

THE LADY (*impatiently*)

Oh, both of you, be still!

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Now, you see, your husband should have come.

THE LADY

My good woman, I told you I preferred not; he is so contented where he is — among *my* friends.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Alack! Is he then never to come again?

THE LADY

Don't expect him.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

But the songs? The tunes he made, and paid for with his heart?

THE LADY

Fortunately, it's no longer a question of that.

[The stray's white face peers round at her. Its eyes seem to burn the woman in the chair.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Good ma'am, pretty ma'am, you don't mean he's give up — singin'?

THE LADY

Oh, yes. Poets usually do, you know, when they marry rich women. Weak, the lot of them.

[The crouching figure half starts up; its teeth are bared; then it sinks back again. The countrywoman, covering her head with her apron, begins to sway in her chair.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Alack! Alack the day! Alack the winter time!

THE LADY

Indeed? I didn't know people like you cared for poetry.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

He'll sing no more; he'll pay no more. The land's end will be poor and still.

THE LADY

Ah, now I understand you. You have a point of view; well, so have the wives of poets. Just as he gave you comfort in return for his inspiration, we give them ease in which to love us. Why shouldn't we? Why should they play at their little toy battle with life, when we can put all existence into their hands? That is our mission; and it makes them very comfortable, I assure you.

[Behind the lady, the stray springs up with clawing hands; the countrywoman catches her movement.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Here, girl, here!

[At the cry, the stray sinks back on the floor. But her eyes never cease to burn the woman's face. The poet's wife, looking down, has now become aware of her. Her silly suspicion seems assured.]

THE LADY (*sharply*)

Who is this?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*moving the stray back*)

A poor waif, ma'am. A harmless, dumb waif, who helps me in the house.

THE LADY

Oho! Did you mention her among my husband's friends?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Why, no. He never saw her. Been here only a month she has, the poor creature.

THE LADY

Where did she come from?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

The good Lord knows! Not I.

THE LADY

Ah. Well, from the looks of her, I should say it didn't matter, how long she was with you. . . .
Come here, girl.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Mind what the lady bids you.

[The figure on the floor lifts a face, now expressionless, to the poet's wife. For the third time, the maid crosses herself.]

THE LADY

Hm! The total effect of you is not — dangerous. *(She takes the stray's face between her hands. A violent shudder shakes the latter from head to foot, as she shrinks back with a gliding motion; but this does not discourage the poet's wife)* Don't be afraid of me, silly thing! *(She turns to the countrywoman)* Funny how fashion impresses them, isn't it? This girl turned clammy cold.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN *(nodding)*

It's the feel of her.

[The poet's wife returns to her scrutiny of the girl's face.]

THE LADY

Yet, you know, your features aren't so bad. If you only had a little color. . . . You should never wear gray with that white face of yours. *(She addresses the room in general, and the maid in particular)* Country people invariably have no idea how to dress. Eh, Nora?

THE MAID

Ma'am, for the love of God, be careful! I'm not liking the *eyes* of herself!

THE LADY (*laughing lightly*)

Oh, her eyes are so much better than her clothes! But I forgot; you're not fit to talk to to-night, are you? Well, that will do. (*She turns back to the countrywoman*) Why do you let your servant wear that awful cap? Doesn't she ever take it off?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Many's the time I've spoke of it; but it's a stubborn habit with her. So I lets her have her way, for peace.

THE LADY (*to the stray*)

But, my poor girl, that cap is awful! If only your hair showed, you'd be so much better looking. What makes you wear it?

[*For answer, the stray, rising, shuffles past the poet's wife to the table. It is the first time during the scene that she has looked away from her. As she nears the table, the maid on the other side shrinks back. Once there, the stray turns on the woman, and, watching her instead of what she herself does, she reaches for the candle. She lifts the metal extinguisher from the candlestick, holds it out so that the poet's wife may see it, then with a quick motion places it over the flame. The candle goes out, leaving the room dim with one light. In her nervousness, the serving maid sobs once aloud.*]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

What would this be?

THE LADY

Do you know what she meant?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

 I don't see. . . . I don't see. . . .

THE LADY

She's probably mad, poor soul.

THE MAID

Oh, Mother of God! Mother of God! The magic!

THE LADY

I fail to find any magic in a candle going out, when I've just watched the process. Really, I prefer bed to such gloomy companionship. (*She rises, and speaks to the countrywoman*) Will you light us upstairs, please? I'm quite sorry I came.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*relighting the second candle*)

There, there, good ma'am. It'll all be more cheerful in the morning.

THE LADY

I feel as if morning would never come, with this whole night dragging at me.

[*The countrywoman gives the candle to Nora, who has picked up her mistress' bag. Then the old dame crosses toward the candle on the shelf.*]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Now, if you and your woman will follow me. . . .

The poet's room was ready for him. . . .

[*This mention of the poet brings another convulsive motion from the stray. The lady's attention is thereby arrested.*]

THE LADY

Where does that creature sleep?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Oh, down here, on a mat by the fireside. She'll not trouble you more, good ma'am. She'll not trouble you more.

[*She opens the door to the stairs.*]

THE LADY (*after a brief hesitation*)

Come, Nora.

[*She goes out. The countrywoman pauses to say to the stray.*

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Good night, girl. Go to sleep quietly. (*She disappears, and we hear her voice*) Now, good ma'am. Now, so please you. . . .

[*The room, lighted only by Nora's candle, is dim again. Outside, the night is very black. The serving maid crosses the room silently. In its center, she passes close to the stray, who has crept there to look after the poet's wife. The maid, making a quick detour, gasps with terror. When she reaches the fireplace, she rushes for the stairs with a little scream that puts her candle out; we hear the door bang behind her. The room is completely black.*

A silence. Then the motion of some one springing upright; and the place is suffused with a dim glow of orange light. The light shines from the orange-red hair of the white-faced girl, a burning mass of quivering, gleaming strands. And the girl herself stands revealed, a spirit-creature, red and white, and clad in fluttering gray, her body slim and swaying with infinite grace. Not even the poet's wife could question the beauty of her wild white face, lit into a fierce exaltation by the glow of that tumbling hair. In her fingers is the ugly cap, held mockingly toward the door; and then she drops it. Now a faint music sounds from somewhere, a languorous melody; and the spirit begins to sway to it. Not quite a dance, yet nothing else, this moving through the room. The door to the stairs opens, and the poet's wife appears, trailing a white room-robe about her. The white-faced girl smiles at her, smiles quite close to her, with a demon behind her smile.

THE LADY

Who are you? . . . Why do you smile at me — unless . . . you're *glad* that I came down? . . . You knew I would answer to that music — *he* used to sing me a song to it, when he courted me. . . . Was it out of his love for you, he made that song? . . . Oh, it might well have been, you with your long white arms and your strange white face! . . . But he sang it to me, do you hear? To me, to me, to me, it is my song!

You smile. . . . You are so sure it isn't mine. . . . But you aren't singing it now, any more than I am! . . . Where does that music come from? . . . What *are* you?

Oh, I knew there was something here that held him. . . . I had all the right to him. . . . I took his life, and made of it what I would — but I couldn't reach his soul. It was bound up to something else, his soul. . . . I wanted to see. . . . I see now. . . . But I don't understand!

What are you? Can you talk? . . . You can, you can, you devil! You called me down to tell your story, didn't you? . . . Well, triumph over me, — triumph! . . . only, *speak!* (*The white-faced girl, in her dance, is moving toward the outer door, ever eluding the poet's wife, who takes a few steps after her*) No, you're not going away without it, you and your magic hair! (*She reaches desperately for the waving hand, which glides from under her grasp*) You burned him with that hair . . . you burned the soul out of him. . . . But now I've come in his place, and you can't burn me, and I *will* learn why you smile! (*Again*

the reach, and the white hand slips away) Do you mean you can't talk? . . . Or do you want me alone? . . . *(The white-faced girl, near the door, has raised a beckoning hand. There is now a teasing invitation in her smile)* Oh, I'm not afraid to go with you, out there! . . . Wait! Wait!

[For the white-faced girl has opened the door. As the poet's wife crosses the room, the countrywoman comes drawn by the talk, down the stairs. She gives a sudden shriek.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Oh, God!

THE LADY *(briefly turning, annoyed)*

What, you?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

I heard. I came. *(The poet's wife takes another step)*
Don't follow, don't follow, for the love of Heaven!
It's the Will-o'-the-Wisp!

[In the doorway, the white-faced girl stoops, and smiles her smile, and beckons.

THE LADY *(with authority)*

Let be! . . . I am going after her! . . . I am going to learn the truth!

[She nears the door, just as the serving maid appears at the foot of the stairs. With a scream, Nora rushes to the poet's wife and clings to her.

THE MAID

Stay back! Stay back! It's to your death you go!

THE LADY *(pushing her to the floor)*

Take your hands off me. . . . There are no such things as spirits! . . . It's a trick they made for me! . . . my husband and her! WAIT! . . .

[For the white-faced girl has passed outside. Only the glow of her hair, quite near, shines in through the open door.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

The Will-o'-the-Wisp! . . . It's her! . . . It's her!

THE MAID (*crying out at the same time*)

Stop, I tell ye! . . . Stop, stop, stop!

[The poet's wife is on the threshold. The orange light recedes, and the room darkens.]

THE LADY (*almost majestic*)

Wait! . . . I'm not afraid! . . . WAIT FOR ME! . . .

[She, too, passes outside the door. The serving maid breaks into a torrent of sobs. After a moment, in which the countrywoman reaches the window, the room is black again. And the music has died away.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

Hush! . . . (*The sobs of the serving maid die down to a low moan*) Come here by me at the window. Ah, see!

THE MAID (*whispering*)

What is it?

[Now through door and window, there can be seen in the distance a moving light, growing smaller and smaller, making straight for where one saw the cliff head over the sea.]

THE COUNTRYWOMAN

The light! The Will-o'-the-Wisp! And something white behind it!

THE MAID (*whispering*)

Is it — me mistress?

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*turning away*)

Yes. God have mercy upon her.

[The maid has dragged herself over to the window, and kneels on the floor, looking out.]

THE MAID

A shadow in the dark, lit up by that thing ahead!

Oh, it is! It is!

THE COUNTRYWOMAN (*nervng herself for the sight*)

Ah, the spirit! — it's *out beyond* the cliff head! And the cold sea lies beneath! Woe to one who follows the Will-o'-the-Wisp! Woe!

[Then a slight pause, in which the light no longer moves.]

THE MAID (*crying out*)

Look, where the light is after standing still! And not a sign of *her!* . . . Oh, she's gone over! Gone, she is! And she'll never come back! . . .

[She starts to keen, as the curtain falls.]

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CLOSED STACKS

812

Halman

Set the stage for eight

Mr 30'32 - 12752

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JAN 25 '38

Joe G. Robkin
298 McKenzie

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CLOSED STACKS

812

Halman

Set the stage for
eight

